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# **FAR-RIGHT REVISIONISM AND THE END OF HISTORY**

## **ALT/HISTORIES**

Edited by  
Louie Dean Valencia-García



# Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History

In *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of the History: Alt/Histories*, historians, sociologists, neuroscientists, lawyers, cultural critics, and literary and media scholars come together to offer an interconnected and comparative collection for understanding how contemporary far-right, neo-fascist, Alt-Right, Identitarian and New Right movements have proposed revisions and counter-narratives to accepted understandings of history, fact and narrative. The innovative essays found here bring forward urgent questions to diverse public, academic and politically minded audiences interested in how historical understandings of race, gender, class, nationalism, religion, law, technology and the sciences have been distorted by these far-right movements. If scholars of the last twenty years, like Francis Fukuyama, believed that neoliberalism marked an 'end of history', this volume shows how the far right is effectively threatening democracy and its institutions through the dissemination of alt-facts and histories.

**Louie Dean Valencia-García** is Assistant Professor of Digital History at Texas State University, has taught at Harvard University, and is founding co-chair of the Council for European Studies at Columbia University's Critical European Studies Research Network. He is Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right.

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Alt/Histories

Edited by  
Louie Dean Valencia-García



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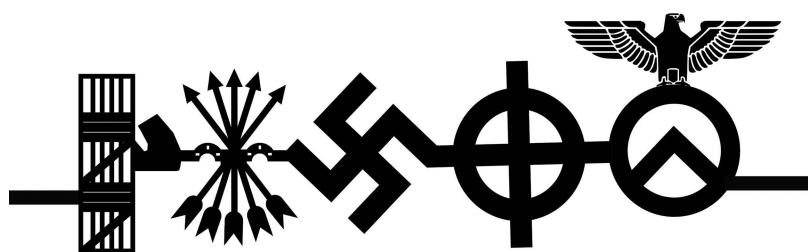
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**Dedicated to all those who face discrimination and those  
who fight to have their histories made visible.**

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Louie Dean Valencia-García



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*Figure 1.1* A Génération Identitaire protest march in 2017. One banner reads ‘On est chez nous’—this is our home—, a popular chant held at the far-right rallies of Rassemblement national leader Marine Le Pen. Photo by Pulek1. Note: Image from WikiCommons. Licensed by Creative Commons.

# 1 Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History

*Louie Dean Valencia-García*

In 2013, members of the French ethno-nationalist youth group ‘Génération Identitaire’ (Generation Identity) posted a video to the digital video platform YouTube in an attempt to propagate a fear of immigrants whilst simultaneously claiming they had ‘discovered’ their history—as though it were something lost, hidden.<sup>1</sup> They asserted in their declaration, ‘We’ve rejected your history books to re-gather our memories’. The black and white video featured young, white men and women close-up, completing each other’s sentences:

We’ve stopped believing in a ‘global village’ and the ‘family of man’. We discovered we have roots, ancestry, and therefore a future. Our heritage is our land, our blood, our identity. We are the heirs to our own future... The lambda emblem, painted on our proud Spartan shields, is our symbol.<sup>2</sup>

The members of Génération Identitaire rejected the globalised world in which they grew up and took a stylised version of the Spartan’s ancient symbol ( $\Lambda$ ) as their own, declaring war on the world they saw as a product of the cultural revolution of the 1960s—which was a culminating moment for anti-colonial struggles and for the civil rights for people of colour, women and queer people in Europe, the United States and in former colonies. Of course, these so-called ‘identitarians’ seemed to ignore the fact that ancient Sparta was never a unifying pro-Hellenic force; moreover, it had its own very queer history that certainly would have clashed with how the group imagined that ancient past.<sup>3</sup>

History, popularly, is a thing which is stretched, invented and made of stubborn clichés that refuse to give way:

History repeats itself.  
The more things change, the more they stay the same.  
Winners write the history.

History is made of fragments. Sometimes these pieces are things jotted down in a journal or a scrap of paper. History is created out of

newspapers, cave paintings, buildings, art, word-of-mouth, ruins, geological or scientific investigations, statues, fables, excavations and television shows. History is saved in museums, libraries, government and organisational archives, graves, shipwrecks, pyramids, attics and Twitter. Historians sift through these ephemera in their attempt to reconstruct and understand the past. When digging through this material, historians quickly realise the truth of the matter is that nothing repeats exactly the same—although there certainly are patterns to be investigated. Culture is not static and sometimes the ‘losers’ also write history—seen in the US context where numerous American military bases have been named after Confederate ‘heroes’.<sup>4</sup>

If visualised, some might think of history as a Picasso painting, distorted, broken in fragments, but screaming with meaning. Others might see it as Michelangelo’s *David*, a form that looks perfect from one angle, but in reality, it is distorted to privilege a singular perspective. Yet still, someone might see history as something like a Georgia O’Keefe painting, natural but heavily coded. Perhaps it is like the photography of Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao, whose infinitely detailed photos are comprised of layer after layer of stitched together images of the same place at different times, conveying some sort of greater truth in the final product. Yet still, others think of history like the *Artemision Bronze*—masculine, powerful and enduring. As traditionalists, many members of the Identitarian movement would most likely identify with this latter understanding of history.

Traditionalism, as the Italian esoteric fascist philosopher Julius Evola (1898–1974) understood it, is a sort of idealised, static idea of the past that is deeply rooted in custom and a nation’s spirit, as well as blood. The traditionalist world is one that is the ‘antithesis’ of the modern world. For Evola, and those Identitarians who have adopted his philosophy, traditionalists are those elite who stand in the ruins of modernity, who rise above depravity and degeneration, who both harden themselves against change but also have found traditionalist values that they see as now hidden from most men. To understand how the far right comprehends history one must understand that for their ideologues our contemporary age is one of decline and degeneracy. For them, an idealised, imagined past must be restored.

History has long been thought of a cyclical—at least since Polybius proposed his cycles of political evolution.<sup>5</sup> Traditionalists, like Evola, conceive of history as a sort of politics of inevitability—that we rotate between a golden age, silver age, bronze age and dark (or iron) age.<sup>6</sup> This type of teleology is prominent amongst many older traditions globally. In Nordic pagan tradition, a golden age (*gullaldr*) comes after Ragnarök, the end of our current epoch. In Christianity, humans began in paradise, suffered a fall, found redemption, but still face a coming

apocalypse—followed by an eventual return to paradise for the select few. In Hinduism, there, too, are cycles. Even Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), much accredited for the explosion of humanistic thought and inquiry in the ‘Renaissance’, believed himself to be living in a ‘dark age’—much to the chagrin of medievalists.<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, traditionalists see the world we live in as part of a cyclical narrative that always needs redemption. Evola writes, ‘When a cycle of civilization is reaching its end, it is difficult to achieve anything by resisting it and by directly opposing the forces in motion. The current is too strong; one would be overwhelmed’. Like Evola, many in the far right today see themselves as ‘riding the tiger’, being of an elite who is able to withstand and master the wild animal of modernity—to surf above the turbulent waters below them.<sup>8</sup> For them, history has entered its low point and thus must be restarted—some believe in a theory of ‘accelerationism’—an attempt by white nationalists to hasten what they see as an inevitable race war—which has led to violent attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand and El Paso, Texas.<sup>9</sup>

Most recently, the belief in history as cyclical found its way into United States President Donald Trump’s campaign rhetoric—calling to ‘Make America Great Again’. Of course, *when exactly* this great past was is never specified—but one surmises it is before queer people



*Figure 1.2* United States President Donald Trump wearing a ‘Make America Great Again’ hat. The phrase recalls an unspecified idealised past—a fascistic palingenetic tendency. Windover Way Photography/Shutterstock.com.

could marry, or even before there were protections for people with disabilities, or maybe before women had their right to abortion recognised by the US Supreme Court. Worse, maybe this supposed era of greatness was during Jim Crow, or before the American Civil War. Mussolini wanted to bring back the greatness of the Roman Empire. Hitler looked to the pre-Weimar years. Francisco Franco recalled the Spanish Empire and the so-called the ‘Reconquest’, which persecuted and exiled Muslims and Jews. By seeing time as cyclical, something that can be ‘brought back’, the far right celebrates an idealised past where the white man was master of his home and the colonised world. This cyclical thinking is what allows for what historian Timothy Snyder calls ‘a politics of inevitability’.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the traditionalist understanding of history as cyclical is inherently challenged by progressive understandings of history. In progressive narratives there is not a desire to return to the past—the past is past, but informs our present. Rather than focusing on what was, there instead is a desire to move towards a future. This type of history, too, can have its own teleology if there is an assumed end point that must be reached. Somewhat optimistically, in *The End of History and the Last Man* Francis Fukuyama argued,

As mankind approaches the end of the millennium, the twin crises of authoritarianism and socialist central planning have left only one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universal validity: liberal democracy, the doctrine of individual freedom and popular sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

However, even Fukuyama wondered if the ‘present trend toward democracy’ was in fact a ‘cyclical phenomenon’.<sup>12</sup> Speculating about the role of economic crises in the rise of illiberal ideologies he wrote, ‘What reason, then do we have to expect that the situation of the 1970s will not recur, or worse yet, that the 1930s, with its clash of virulent anti-democratic ideologies, can not return?’<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as Fukuyama later points out, both trends are possible, there are ‘cycles in the worldwide fortunes of democracy’ and there is a ‘pronounced secular trend in the democratic direction’.<sup>14</sup> Most resoundingly, Fukuyama worried that the arrival of an ‘end of history’, a supposed triumphant win of liberal democracy, could end with a ‘last man’ who is both ‘self-absorbed’ and ‘devoid of thymotic striving for higher goals in pursuit of...private comforts’. These last men would, he feared, become ‘engaged in bloody and pointless prestige battles, only this time with modern weapons’. Moreover, these last men would not have ‘constructive outlets for [their] *megalothyria*’ which could lead to a ‘resurgence in an extreme and pathological form’ of being. Almost prophetically, writing decades before Donald Trump assumed the presidency of the United States of America, Fukuyama

worried that for all the recognition Trump (and individuals like him) received, they were ‘not the most serious or the most just’. For Fukuyama, despite being in a utopic society, where the world was just and prosperous, there would always be those, like Trump, who could not satisfy their own ‘thymotic’ natures—that is to say their desire for recognition, or supremacy. Indeed, as we have already seen in the Trump presidency, bloody and pointless prestige battles are occurring. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, pathological *megalothymia* and a desire for supremacy have arisen—both in the forms of white supremacist ideology and American nationalist exceptionalism.

## Alt-Histories

Historians Stanley Payne, Roger Griffin, Denis Mack Smith and Robert Paxton have described the fascist palingenetic tendency to recast or idealise an imagined past. In Spain, after the loss of its colonies in 1898, the fascist Falange party pushed a mythical vision of ‘Hispanidad’, a type of Spanish-Nationalism that attempted to recast the Spanish colonial period as benign. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, Nazi sympathisers already were proposing a denial of history and inserting factually untrue conspiracy theories. Through the creation of alternate histories and facts, the far right’s impulse has long been to undermine liberalism (and the Enlightenment project altogether) to re-write and alter history so that to legitimate essentialist, racist, sexist, ethnocentric, nationalist and heteronormative beliefs—what they call ‘traditional’ beliefs, despite knowing those traditionalist beliefs have more to do with nineteenth and twentieth understandings of class, race, nation, gender and sexuality than some ancient past. These beliefs, indeed, lie at the core of what we now recognise as fascism.

The term ‘alt-history’ refers to both white nationalist Richard Spencer’s ‘alt-right’ movement—which readily misconstrues the past and then refers to their own alt-history as authority—, and the rhetoric used by Trump’s counsellor, Kellyanne Conway, who infamously coined the phrase ‘alternative facts’ to describe her (ab)use and skewed interpretations of fact when giving an interview on the American political show *Meet the Press* in 2017. Conway’s use of the phrase indicated a selection of ‘facts’ (which for her did not have to be true) to construct a politically useful narrative—one that is just parallel enough to truth that one must learn to identify the departures from truth to see where the weaving of the narrative becomes undone.

In 2016, American Identitarian and founder of the ‘Alt-Right’ movement Richard Spencer began advocating for a post-American world where a ‘white ethno-state’—‘a homeland for all Europeans from around the world’—would replace the United States as we know it. For Spencer, this would happen through a process of a supposed ‘peaceful



ethnic cleansing’ or ‘peaceful ethnic redistribution’.<sup>15,16</sup> This radical idea for a white ethno-state through ‘cleansing’ or ‘redistribution’ became a regular talking point in Spencer’s interviews and rallies. To legitimate his idea, Spencer often cited the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 as a successful example of ‘peaceful ethnic cleansing’. While indeed, there was an attempt to match national and ethnic identities within the borders of some new nation-states during this era—this process was largely a failure given the complex and overlapping nature of identity. Moreover, as historian Mark Mazower points out in his discussion of aftermath of the Great War,

Exterminating minorities—as the Turks tried with the Armenians—was not generally acceptable to international opinion...The victor powers at Versailles tried a different approach—keeping minorities where they were, and giving them protection in international law to make sure they were properly treated so that in time they would acquire a sense of national belonging.<sup>17</sup>

Displacing populations was never a goal of the Paris Peace Conference. In effect, Spencer used a decontextualised historical occurrence to legitimate a potential future—creating a distorted, alternative version of history that attempted to legitimate a violent process hidden behind a *peace* conference. For Spencer, like many conservatives, what they call history acts to *give* authority, and is *not* as a thing to be considered critically. And, in fact, it can be entirely invented as long as it legitimates their ideologies. A more public version of an attempt to alter history, preventing critique of the US president Donald Trump, was recently seen in a United States National Archives exhibit celebrating the centennial of women’s suffrage which blurred the words of signs in photographs critical of the president; signs referencing women’s anatomy were also blurred. Archives spokeswoman Miriam Kleiman claimed the blurring was not an attempt to ‘to engage in current political controversy’ and ‘keep the focus on the records’. The Archive’s blurred photos were an attempt to erase the history of the 2017 Women’s March.<sup>18</sup>

In the ancient Greek, ‘ἱστορία’, or history, was thought of as a type of inquiry based on knowledge of the past. History was not simply things of the past, or fragments, or mythology, but the process of asking questions about those pieces and describing cause and effect through narrative—to learn something. History requires the practitioner of that inquiry, the historian, to look at the fragments and ask questions of them—taking none of it for granted—and looking for a multitude of perspectives and interpretations. At the professional level, the study of history, like all academic scholarship, requires a certain amount of discernment. We write history to understand where we were, but at the same time, we run the risk of transposing the present on the past—one of the greatest

sins the historian can commit, even though our questions are inherently and inevitably formed by our present. This paradox is unavoidable, but to avoid faulty logic the historian must acknowledge this simple fact and work through it to avoid paralysis.

History is altered through historical revisionism, or the modification or rejection of historic arguments (often based on the interpretation, selection or availability of archives) and the recovery of new historical information. Alt-histories are created by: (1) historical denial, which can include abject rejection of archives and historical evidence; (2) belief in cyclical, or teleological, history which assumes where we are going or where we have been; (3) declination narratives which assume a theory of degeneracy in place of understanding of change; (4) mythologisation that is created when facts are replaced with chimeras; (5) nostalgia for an imagined past that often supposes both a declination and attempts to selectively exclude or underline historical facts and narratives; (6) ahistoricism based purely on untruth; and (7) through often fragmented and biased ways history is remembered and portrayed in popular public memory (films, textbooks, television shows, etc.).

When we impose our present on the past to justify an understanding about the present, we risk creating an alternate timeline. These alternate timelines, when abused and given legs, create what we might call alternative histories—or alt-histories. Through this abuse of history, we see an attempt to uncritically reject both historical consensus and understanding of the past—which presents a very real risk to the study and utility of history itself. Alt-histories are not simply a difference in interpretation of fact but rather are made by intentional distortion. Historians always disagree, but on some level, they still engage with those with whom they disagree as long as those disagreements are made in good faith—this is why historians study historiography, or the history of history. Alt-histories, unlike history itself, reject fact and a genuine interest in knowledge or historical inquiry. Alt-histories use decontextualised historical fragments to legitimate ideology or belief first and foremost, and not to understand how things came to be. Alt-histories are an attempt to change political and historical narratives as part of what many Identitarians call a ‘meta-political’ strategy to legitimate their beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

In the postwar era, as society began to break away from the binaries of cyclical and progressive views of history, and as access to more information than ever before became prevalent, we were left with infinite histories and interpretations. To add to the fragility of history, postmodern thought and false equivalency gave away to a ‘crisis of infinite histories’—where uncritical thinking left some people distrusting of scholarly sources and scientific fact through a sort of teleological loop that justifies ideological prejudices. This postmodern condition that left students and writers of history with an infinitude of interpretations and facts is not inherently a bad thing when considered critically. However,



*Figure 1.3* Supporters of the far-right Golden Dawn party celebrate after the early election results at their offices in Thessaloniki, Greece on 17 June 2012. The group uses a ‘meander’ design to recall ancient Greece, which is also reminiscent of the swastika, another appropriated meander design. Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock.com.

today, many have come to distrust scholarly evidence, which ultimately threatens what we mean by ‘fact’. The alt-histories derived from this distrust depends on invented conspiracies that let the ideologue reconcile illogical or simply untrue conclusions—drawing crooked lines between unrelated nodes. This distrust of academic research has particularly affected the ways some elements of the public accept scholarship across disciplines—from climate change to vaccine sceptics. People fear everything is subjective—that facts are moulded to benefit bottom lines and political expediency—which is not untrue. This does leave the common person asking if everyone has an interpretation and whether all interpretations are equal. The expert thus loses credibility—replaced with internet conspiracy theories.

To make sense of infinite interpretations, people often fall prey to false equivalencies and binary thinking—to hear *both* sides of the story as though there are only two perspectives. Some might even turn against the postmodern world, as though it were an ideology and not merely a description of ways in which people negotiate their lives in the late capitalist, postcolonial era. This desire to reject the complexity of postmodernity—for an imagined *simpler* world of the past—has turned some to the likes of right-wing traditionalist Jordan Peterson.

Postmodernity left us with a construction of time that is neither cyclical nor progressive, but still has elements of both, shattered into alternate and competing timelines. The shattering of the illusion cyclical and progressive history left us trying to figure out ways to usefully study history given the infinite possibilities. This fractured history has also left pressure points that were particularly vulnerable for malintent and that could be leveraged by conspiratorial-minded right-wing ideologues. This book attempts to locate some of those weaknesses.

Postmodern histories, which are part and parcel of late capitalism, are indeed subjects for historical debate, and we should be clear about the dangers embedded in them. However, when mobilised by the radical right to promote and legitimise nationalistic, racist, sexist, queerphobic, xenophobic, classist and ableist ideologies, we end up with ‘alt-histories’. This is also what turns postmodern histories toxic.

### Understanding the Tensions and Constructing Alt/Histories

In the public sphere, charges of ‘revisionism’ are often thrown around when history becomes contentious. Revisionism is not inherently a bad thing. Professional historians know that the process of revising history—looking at new evidence and considering new arguments—is necessary to the study of history. In fact, historiography *depends* on revisions and arguments. However, despite the rigorous scholarship of historians, there always exists the risk that disproven or outdated constructions of history can survive, deform and become fodder for ideological purposes. Often, these distortions are discovered in public memory, or the ways the general public remembers things of the past—existing not only in history books but also in television, movies, museums, podcasts, oral tradition or underbelly message board sites of the internet like 4chan. Thus, alt-histories exist not only in the minds of ideologues, but are constantly attempting to struggle to colonise and replace history itself in the public sphere.

This has recently been seen in the ways that the far right has tried to replace historical facts surrounding Nazism, and more specifically Hitler’s politics, with historical fiction—even seeping its way into the works of otherwise reliable historians. One of the most popular alt-histories contended by the far right, and spurious right-wing propagandists like Dinesh D’Souza,<sup>20</sup> is that ‘Hitler was a socialist’. D’Souza published a book in July 2017 titled *The Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the American Left*. That book, a prototype alt-history, included conspiratorial untruths that were also reiterated in D’Souza’s 2018 film *Death of a Nation*. In fact, on the far-right platform 4chan message board, ‘pol’, the phrase ‘Hitler was a socialist’ found its peak in the months surrounding D’Souza’s 2017 book—and still continues to be extolled regularly.

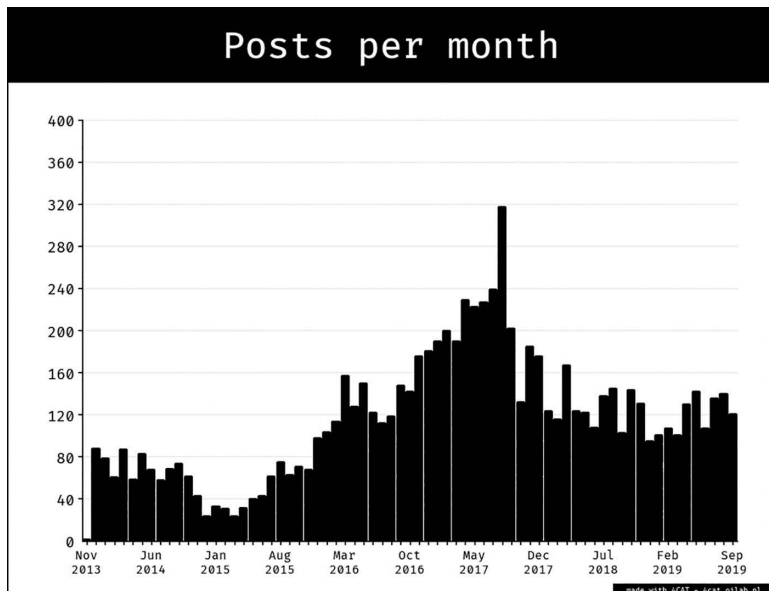


Figure 1.4 The use of the phrase ‘Hitler was a socialist’ had its peak usage on 4chan during the months surrounding the release of Dinesh D’Souza’s 2017 book, *The Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the American Left*. Image produced by Louie Dean Valencia-García using Peeters, Stijn and Sal Hagen. ‘4CAT: Capture and Analysis Toolkit’ Computer software. Vers. 1.0 (2018).

Such alt-histories can even find their way into the books written by prominent scholars such as Brendan Simms—currently a professor in the history of international relations at Cambridge University. This was demonstrated in an eviscerating review in *The Guardian* by the eminent Second World War historian Richard Evans—an emeritus regius professor of history at Cambridge and later president of the Wolfson College at Cambridge. Evans argues Simms’s biography on Hitler essentially conflates socialism and Nazism. Evans argues this is seen when Simms claims, ‘Hitler wanted to establish what he considered racial unity in Germany by overcoming the capitalist order and working for the construction of a new classless society’.<sup>21</sup> Turning Hitler into a socialist would result in the ability to vilify socialism, folding Nazism and socialism into one and the same. In his review, Evans rightly points out, ‘[O]verwhelming consensus of historical scholarship has rejected any idea that Hitler was a socialist’.<sup>22</sup>

While historians constantly have historiographical arguments about interpretations of history, Simms’s argument is based upon misrepresentation of the past—pitting history against an alt-history of dubious

origin. Disentangling Simms's alt-history, Evans forcefully argues Simms attempts to reduce 'virtually all the major events in the history of the Third Reich to a product of anti-Americanism'—that is to say anti-capitalism—even Kristallnacht, the November 1938 pogrom which sent 30,000 Jews to concentration camps. By using anti-Americanism as a rationale for Hitler's actions, Simms attempts to cast Hitler as a zealot anti-capitalist. The stretching and distortions of history do more than bend truth. Evans continues,

In the end, Simms hasn't written a biography in any meaningful sense of the word, he's written a tract that instrumentalises the past for present-day political purposes. As such, his book can be safely ignored by serious students of the Nazi era.<sup>23</sup>

Anecdotally, belief that 'Hitler was a socialist' has become so prevalent that even in my survey courses of European history I have even had students attempt to make this same argument in class. Those students often point to Hitler's own use of 'National Socialism' to describe his ideologies. Simply put, Hitler, like Mussolini and Franco, sent leftists, socialists and communists to prisons and concentration camps and frequently appropriated rhetoric from leftists for political purposes. Fascists were, in fact, against socialism because of its focus on class issues over those of the nation. Simms, in promoting this conflation, opens the door for history to be replaced—altered.

As this case demonstrates, there are serious tensions between history and alt-history playing out both in the public sphere and amongst scholars. This volume uses the term 'alt/histories' to illustrate those tensions. Moreover, it attempts to understand how alt-histories are created by the far right—analysing how they move radical ideologies into the public sphere by using mutated version of facts and history to legitimate such beliefs. The authors propose methodology and practice on how to deconstruct and combat fascistic projects. Importantly, this book, a work of historiography imaginatively conceived to spill outside of the discipline of history, acknowledges that scholars of all disciplines and non-scholars alike all have a stake in history. To this end, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, cultural theorists, literary scholars, neurologists, lawyers, classicists and activists have all contributed to this book. By bringing such a wide variety of experts together we can learn ways in which history, law and scientific knowledge have been weaponised by the far right more broadly.

Necessarily, because of the fragmentary, layered and constructed nature of all archives (public and private), the field of history can quite literally include *anything*. However, age does not make those fragments into history—only rigorous analysis does that. Alt-histories are constructed for ideological purposes through the denial of history, the

overemphasis of certain historical facts or an incomplete understanding of historical context. Sometimes they appear as conspiracy theories attempting to explain something unknown or not understood. As weapons, alt-histories are used to exculpate the guilty, casting blame on a marginalised group. Conspiracy theories and the denial of history are often prominent amongst the far right, especially well-known is the case of Holocaust deniers, who reject historical fact outright.<sup>24</sup> This rejection of historical fact, uncritically, creates an archive of knowledge that skews perception of an historical event. Of course, this is not limited to the far right, but is particularly prevalent amongst their ideologues.

In his essay 'Archive Fever' Jacques Derrida famously described how what is saved in an archive reflects the biases of the collectors.<sup>25</sup> When historians do use archives, they must question the evidence collected. A state archive, when not interrogated, can just as easily create an alt-history. History is not 'written by the victors'—but alt-histories certainly can be. This is because most alt-histories are created because of a lack of critical inquiry into the past. Academic historians are scholars trained to collect evidence, reference secondary sources and are expected to constantly revise history, adding new nuance and details. Historians must also look beyond the archive to understand historical moments or actors—often, this is where historiography becomes most helpful. They must ask what have other scholars written, what have they debated, what sources have they consulted and what is left to be found and considered. Alt-histories fundamentally are like alternate timelines that are reliant upon unprovable, imagined or impossible pasts. Alt-histories are meant to be biased and avoid the process of historical inquiry.

While it might seem obvious, generally, progressives see history as unfinished—there is always work left pending to bring forth progress. Sometimes this is thought of as a fight for equality, sometimes the advent of a new technology. History is propelled not by the simple passage of time, but instead by the decisions people make in order to make history—their agency. Even Karl Marx expected a moment in which after the proletariat had won the battle against capitalism, there would be a utopia waiting at the end—the proletariat would become historical actors, take ownership of their labour and build utopia. Marx was less clear on how we would arrive to this utopia—a still hotly contested question. Communists of the Stalin variety saw a need to impose their vision of the future through a strong centralised state. Anarchists, on the other hand, asked for change to come through coalition and consensus building, along with the radical decentralisation of power structures. Democratic Socialists wanted to install socialism, maintain a strong state, but were determined that socialism would eventually win the day in parliamentary votes. Fascists looked to an imagined past for inspiration for their future.

Sometimes, history is created by chance. Someone throws a net into a running river, and that net catches some sort of artefact that gives us new insight into our past. The historian's job is to scrutinise each artefact and attempt to find a narrative that explains some aspect of the past or present. However, this is not how all people see history. For many, one discovers history by using a sort of harpoon that shoots through the past and cuts through to a predetermined target. This is what historians call teleology.

The inclination to see history as cyclical is nothing new. We see it in the repetition of minutes, hours, months, years—all dependent upon the simple rotation around the sun. So-called 'ages'—bracketed-off periods such as the so-called 'dark age' (or what is often referred to as the 'Kali Yuga' in so-called 'traditionalist' thought), 'golden age' and 'iron age'—, necessitate a declination narrative and mythic heroes to somehow turn the wheel of time. We see this particularly in the construction of the European Renaissance (or Rebirth). According to G.W. Trompf:

Conceived in its simplest form, the idea of renaissance entails a belief that a given set of (approved) general conditions constitutes the revival of a former set which had in the interim been considered defunct or dying. Although enriched by cyclical lines of thought (by the idea of successive civilizations, decomposition followed by rebirth, the Golden Age returned, etc.), it falls into a separate category, and its history reflects a complex interlacing of classical and Christian threads.<sup>26</sup>

As any historian of the medieval period will argue, the terms 'Renaissance' and even 'Enlightenment' impose a bias onto the past—portraying the time before the Renaissance as 'dark' or in decay. Indeed, cyclical interpretations of history have grave repercussions for the ways the general public understands the past, and potentially can affect the future. In this way, the past cannot be left in the past—trapping us with no escape into the future.

### **Refreshing and Reloading the Reconquest: An Alt-History**

In the wake of the mass murder by a white nationalist terrorist targeting Latinos in El Paso, Texas in the summer of 2019, which resulted in 22 deaths and 24 injuries, Todd Starnes, the host of *Fox Nation*, argued, 'I do believe that we have been invaded by a horde. A rampaging horde of illegal aliens. This has been a slow-moving invasion'. He continues to dehumanise refugees by calling them 'violent criminals'—effectively depicting them as 'Other'. In choppy sentence fragments Starnes argues:



When you go back in time and when you look at what an invasion is—whether it is the Nazis invading France and western Europe. I mean, whether the Muslims were invading a country back in the early years. It was an invasion.

In this example, Starnes decontextualises history and strings it together into fragments so that to leverage it as a weapon. His reference to ‘hordes’ recalls medieval fears of a Mongol invasion. He then pivots to compare invaders to the Nazis, who were proponents of ethnic cleansing and genocide. He then references Muslim invaders and thus the crusades or ‘reconquest’ of Spain. Effectively, his argument is that refugees and migrants are attempting to invade the West and will eventually ethnically cleanse the West—what far-right conspiracy theorists call ‘white genocide’. For Starnes, history is a weapon to be wielded to legitimate his far-right ideology, and worse, the acts taken by the El Paso shooter.<sup>27</sup>

To better understand how history is appropriated, revised and repurposed for nationalist purposes we can look at the long history of the Christian ‘Reconquista’ of the Iberian Peninsula. The Reconquista, or reconquest, recounts a myth that after 700 years of occupation, beginning in 711, ‘invading’ Muslims were expelled in 1492 by Isabel of Castilla and Fernando of Aragón, ‘the Catholic Kings’, after the fall of the Tarifa of Granada. While yes, Fernando and Isabel’s troops did indeed conquer Granada, the myth of the reconquest imposes an historical fiction onto Spain. Prior to 711, Iberia was a religiously diverse territory—even its Christian population was not monolithic. A ‘reconquest’ of Spain imposes a narrative that a Kingdom of Spain had once been a fact prior to the arrival of Muslims. In reality, Spain as a nation-state is a modern and contested construction. Integral to the creation of this history is the expulsion of Jewish people in Iberia—the Sephardi—whom had been in the peninsula since the beginning of the common era until their expulsion. In addition to expanding their conquest of the peninsula the Catholic Kings also demonstrated their religious extremism in the Americas, attempting to first enslave and then convert natives across the Atlantic to Catholicism. Obsessed with ‘limpieza de sangre’ [cleanliness of blood], a form of ethnic cleansing, the newly founded Kingdom of Spain became a model for colonisation and racialised and religious persecution.

This history of Reconquest, ‘taking back’ Muslim Spain is the foundational myth of the Spanish nation. At the centre of this Reconquest myth is Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (c. 1043–1099), a mercenary and warrior nicknamed ‘El Cid’—a word derived from the Arabic ‘*sayyid*’, or ‘lord’ or ‘master’.<sup>28</sup> El Cid was born to lower nobility, and centuries later became a symbol of Spanishness. However, as Richard Fletcher describes:



*Figure 1.5* Statue of El Cid in Burgos, Spain. Botond Horvath/Shutterstock.com.

There is a disjunction... between eleventh-century reality and later mythology. In Rodrigo's day there was little if any sense of nationhood, crusade or reconquest in the Christian kingdoms of Spain. Rodrigo himself... was as ready to fight alongside Muslims against Christians as vice versa. He was his own man and fought for his own profit.<sup>29</sup>

The reality of Rodrigo's life and motivations, in fact, was quite different than the myths, histories and legends that followed his life. He was a mercenary for hire, as were many warriors of the period, with an Arabic derived nickname. El Cid fought battles with and against Muslims; however, popularly, El Cid's image became a bellicose one associated with fighting against Muslim 'invaders'.

Under the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco, images of Spanish greatness often referenced images of the 'Reconquista' and the 'Conquest' of the Americas.<sup>30</sup> Of course, any scholarly understanding of those moments requires a reckoning with the deaths of millions and the expulsions of large parts of the Iberian population. The image of both the Christian Reconquest and the Conquest of the Americas

was dependent upon an imagining of the past that simply never was but became accepted as truth by most Spaniards. The alt-history effectively replaced history itself—and still holds a strong grip on the country's popular imagination.

In 1955, with the support of Franco, a statue by the artist Juan Cristóbal was erected to commemorate El Cid in Burgos, the largest town near where the warrior was born. Curiously, one article in *A.B.C.*, the Falangist mouthpiece and Spanish newspaper of record, even hinted at one way in which the image of El Cid was invented, claiming: 'The iconography of El Cid is completely imagined'—with the detail of El Cid's beard coming only in the epic poem written about him, after the fact.<sup>31</sup> Another contemporary article referenced the statue by Cristóbal as the 'essence and spiritual example of Castilian lands' and a 'grand figure of the History of Spain'.<sup>32</sup>

Those invested in a narrative of a unified Spain, from the Catholic Kings to Francisco Franco, anchored their vision of the country to El Cid—a figure of the distant past who was decontextualised, appropriated and imbued with nationalist historical significance and meaning. Strictly speaking, to call El Cid a Spanish national hero demonstrates a clear example of an alt-history. There was no Spain in El Cid's time. In the 1950s, the director of the Spanish Royal Academy, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, attempted to rescue El Cid's narrative as one that was not specifically nationalist, but somehow rooted in a sort of nobility and patriotism. The hagiographic historian twists El Cid's story yet again and calls it 'democratic' because it showed how lower ranking nobility could become legendary, he argues:

[E]l *poema del Cid* is not national because of the patriotism that it manifests, but better to say it is a sketch of the people where it was written. The most noble qualities of the people who made him their hero are reflected: love of family...; unbreakable fidelity; magnanimous generosity and haughtiness toward the King; the intensity of sentiment and the loyal sobriety of expression. The deeply national democratic spirit is incarnate in that 'good servant who doesn't have a good lord', in that simple hidalgo [low-ranking aristocracy], who, unappreciated by high nobility and abandoned by his King, completes great deeds, and takes on all the power of Morocco and sees his daughters become queens... This genre of nationalism, less energetic, but more ample than the militaristic patriotism of *Roland*, can be felt more generally and permanently...<sup>33</sup>

Writing under Franco's dictatorship, Menéndez Pidal simultaneously re-defined 'patriotism' and 'democracy' so that to allow for Franco's vision of Spain to survive in the post-Hitler era. In this way a nationalist war hero could be reimagined as a patriotic, democratic hero—an argument

that could legitimate Franco to democratic Europe. El Cid, essentially, became a military leader, like Franco, who rose to power amongst an elite—thus somehow making him, and Franco, both patriotic and democratic—not a nationalistic leader who overthrew democracy and was responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths. In 1961, Hollywood, too, fell for El Cid—with a blockbuster film by the same name starring Charlton Heston and financially supported by the Franco régime. El Cid's narrative not only came to represent Spain internally, but became an international symbol of Spanishness.

The placement of Juan Cristóbal's statue in Burgos was no coincidence, as the city was a stronghold for the Falange and Franco's army during the Spanish Civil War and the Francoist period. In the Francoist narrative, Spain's Civil War, the so called 'War of Liberation', was framed as a sort of 'Reconquest'. Franco's 'War of Liberation' did not expel Muslims and Jews, but was one that expelled, ostracised, imprisoned, murdered and exiled those from the political left, queer people and others who had taken Spain away from God and country. Despite the end of Franco's regime and the establishment of the current democracy, by the early 2000s, the image of El Cid, and Burgos itself, had become a place where far-right skinhead ideology festered. One group in particular, Skinheads Burgos, even held a yearly ceremony at the statue of El Cid to celebrate the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain—and recorded songs dedicated to El Cid. In fact, popularly, many, if not most, Spaniards believe this myth.

Today, thousands of tourists visit a weeklong festival dedicated to El Cid in Burgos. In this case, the alt-history created out of the fragments of El Cid's life is celebrated both popularly and by the radical right. With this simple example, we see just how a historical person has become twisted into something clearly unrecognisable to history. Such is the fate of other such figures, like Joan of Arc, King Arthur, Richard the Lionheart, Roland and William Wallace. Even Abraham Lincoln, who waged a civil war to emancipate enslaved black Americans, has become a shield for a party that bears his standard only to deflect criticism of clearly racist ideologies. Lincoln once served as plausible deniability for a racist party; now, the dissonance is raw and out in the open.

### **Fighting Zombie Fascism: Queering and Decolonising the West<sup>34</sup>**

Historians, activists and scholars of all disciplines must find new ways to turn these alt-histories, these distorted narratives, in on themselves. To make history less Eurocentric and heteronormative it is not only necessary to present a more accurate version of history but also necessary to prevent the far right from using it as a recruitment tool. Historians have talked about decolonising and queering national histories for decades

now—especially those of former colonies. It is time to decolonise and queer European and American history and scholarship more broadly. We have to present pluralist histories of nations and peoples—stories forgotten or never highlighted—that clearly contradict far-right narratives. European history has always been pluralistic. By more fully demonstrating pluralism already present in the history of Europe, based on historical fact and analysis, we can show that the alt-histories the far right utilise to legitimate their own power are fictions—whether a belief in a homogenous European past or an attempt to make America Great Again.

Recently, Javier Ortega Smith, the leader of the Spanish far-right party, Vox, came under scrutiny for language that Spanish Attorney General Luis Navajas called ‘abominable’ and ‘repulsive’ although not a hate crime.<sup>35</sup> Ortega Smith claimed:

Our common enemy, the enemy of Europe, the enemy of liberty, the enemy of progress, the enemy of democracy, the enemy of family, the enemy of life, the enemy of the future is an invasion, an Islamic invasion... What we know and understand as civilization is at risk.

Ortega Smith called upon old concepts of ‘western civilisation’ and the so-called Spanish Reconquest that have long been used to mask hate and excuse violence.

Historically, being ‘western’ or ‘civilised’ was a powerful weapon used to legitimate the domination of others who were not of the elite or were outside Europe. Despite the fact that the first recorded civilisations or settled groups of people began in ancient Mesopotamia, modern-day Iraq, the promise of ‘civilisation’ somehow became the provenance of Europe alone. The promise of ‘Western civilisation’ became an excuse to dominate—to ‘civilise’ others. In the Spanish case, this was readily made apparent in the *encomienda* system that systematically enslaved native populations in the Americas. Other European colonial powers adopted similar rationales for their empires; it became ‘the white man’s burden’ to spread Western civilisation. Of course, native populations in the Americas and elsewhere already had civilisations long before Europeans arrived, and were rarely admitted as part of the Western club.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the German academic Oswald Spengler wrote *The Decline of the West*, a work that demonstrated racist and proto-fascist tropes as it decried the fall of Western civilisation and underlined the importance of strengthening blood ties in order to save the West. This fear of the fall of the West later popped up again during the Cold War and even in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks in the United States.<sup>36</sup> Powerful countries seem to need to summon up a millenarianism, sounding the death of the West in moments of anxiety



*Figure 1.6* The secretary general of the Vox extreme right party, Javier Ortega Smith, in Pamplona, Spain places a Spanish flag on the lectern in November 2018. MiguelOses/Shutterstock.com.

about the loss of power, while also using a desire to renew the nation to legitimate their power—reifying their position in the world.

More recently, in 2016, Gavin McInnes, a co-founder of VICE Media, began a men's exclusive group called the Proud Boys.<sup>37</sup> On the Proud Boys' website, they declare that they accept people of 'all races', 'all religions', 'gay or straight'. However, to join the Proud Boys one must 'be a man' and 'must love the West'. One video featured on their website claims that all the Proud Boys care about is that one believes 'the West is the best'.<sup>38</sup> The group is composed of self-proclaimed 'Western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world'. McInnes has described a chauvinist as simply being 'a nationalist, a patriot'. McInnes conflates nationalism and patriotism—pride in one's country as opposed to the belief in the superiority of that nation in a way not dissimilar to Ramón Menéndez Pidal's usage 70 years earlier to legitimate Franco's dictatorship. McInnes's broad category of 'western chauvinism' translates to a type of Western nationalism akin to 'European nationalism'—a concept that might read as 'white nationalism'—without being entirely obvious. Indeed, these chauvinistic ideals are a direct product of Western ideologies. They represent the West's most horrendous legacies: fascism, patriarchy and colonialism.

The Proud Boys' website also claims the group confuses 'the media because the group is anti-SJW without being alt-right'. This claim to be 'anti-Social Justice Warrior' is curious, as it most often refers to those who are interested in promoting civil rights and pointing out injustices, regardless of one's race, gender, class, nationality or embodiment. When the so-called social justice warriors (SJWs) point to social inequality because of discrimination, it is an attempt to have human rights recognised—an ideal embedded in Enlightenment thought. Even the Proud Boys' desire to dubiously claim to not discriminate because of race, sexuality or religion is a product of the Enlightenment. Of course, for the group, there seems to be a complete lack of understanding about what the Enlightenment was, including the importance of seeking redress for injustice from a democratic government, as well as a complete lack of interest in what equality means today. The so-called SJWs, in reality, represent what might be the most important ideals of Western thought that stretch from Rousseau to Angela Davis.

Meanwhile, the 'men-only' exclusivity of the Proud Boys is a clear demonstration of chauvinism against women. The Proud Boys' reactionary website is against women and denies the existence of transgender people, stating: 'Our group is and will always be MEN ONLY (born with a penis if that wasn't clear enough for you leftists)!' Women can, however, join the group as 'Proud Boys' Girls'. But even in the women's group name they are subordinate, belonging not to their own group, but to the boys themselves.

Both Ortega Smith and the Proud Boys' versions of Western civilisation reject the Western ideals that are worth defending—a belief in equality, the value of individual and the responsibility of the government to its people. Their visions of the West simply cannot co-exist along with the best hopes for the Enlightenment project. Of course, the best parts of Enlightenment ideals have rarely been a reality, but they are still admirable goals for which to strive. In fact, what we see with both examples is an alt-history of the history of Europe, which has long been competing against the more critical analysis of what the West means. This alt-history has been attempting to replace the actual history of the Europe—replacing history with an alt-history which would legitimate the atrocities committed in the name of Western civilisation.

For decades, historians have argued fascism was a thing relegated to the dustbin of history. With threats from far-right parties such as Golden Dawn, Alternative für Deutschland, Sweden Democrats, Vox, Lega Nord, Casa Pound and far-right leaders such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán, Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini and Boris Johnson, it is clear that far-right fascist parties and ideologies have returned to the mainstream. With mass shootings perpetrated by the likes of Anders Behring Breivik, Dylann Roof, Brenton Tarrant and Patrick Crusius—the list goes on and on—we are witnessing

what can be described as an attack on the pluralistic, democratic public sphere.<sup>39</sup> On the internet, one need not go further than 4chan, YouTube and comment sections of major newspapers to find malicious attacks against women, immigrants, refugees and queer people—even plotting their murder. As this book will show, far-right ideologies and actions are fundamentally legitimated by their misinterpretations of historical facts and those deformations into alt-history—a bait-and-switch claiming to be legitimate history.

Today, refugees—many children—are living in cages in the United States in ‘detainment’ centres. Based on a belief that cleansing the United States of immigrants will somehow ‘Make America Great Again’, immigrants are being demonised as criminals and rounded up and sent to these camps before deportation. A form of fascism has clawed its way back to the mainstream. This zombie fascism is one that we are hesitant to recognise as fascism; in some ways it is more gnarly and in others it is more aesthetic—covering something ugly with flashy branding. Fascism was supposed to be dead—with the exception of some fringe elements. It was never dead but was undead. It just crawled underground and waited. To admit that fascism has indeed taken hold of democratic governments and democratically minded people is to acknowledge that the West has failed at stopping fascism—despite those democracies’ promise to ‘never forget’. Only once we accept that this has happened, once we confront our histories, can we be in a better place to better uproot fascism entirely by depriving it of the alt-histories and nostalgia for a past that never was that give it oxygen.

## Notes

1 According to José Pedro Zúquete,

The Identitarian indictment is a dark account of contemporary European life. Europe has been torn apart by the Western model of civilization that it helped to create, which today is synonymous with Americanization, and this dominant ideology—which in this new century bears the name globalism—has diluted its distinctive character. Its communities, peoples, and cultures have suffered the onslaught of an abstract model that homogenizes all differences, and combats all natural attachments (to nations, regions, cultures, ethnicities), in an attempt to destroy all barriers to the free flow of markets, reducing human beings to a sorrowful condition in which the only identity that is allowed, and celebrated, is that of individual materialism and consumerism.

He continues,

[S]o goes the Identitarian accusation, European elites allowed the “opening of the gates,” the decades-long policies of mass immigration, which softened and corrupted the relatively coherent and homogenous collective identity of European peoples, constituting a major dimension of the self-immolation of the continent’. The more recent surge of immigration or invasion—whose participants the official of thinking and its zealots



labelled ‘migrants’—added fuel to this on-going ‘Great Replacement’ of peoples in European lands. Amid the degradation of its identity, the abjuration of its ancient Indo-European and Hellenic roots, feeling guilty about its own history, and awash in relativism, self-doubt, and self-loathing, Europe is on the verge of being conquered by Islam, a young, rooted, and spiritually strong civilization that is superior to an aging and frail Europe whose treacherous elites are behaving in a manner that is the greatest expression of a civilization in free fall.

- See: José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 2.
- 2 *blocidentitaire*, ‘Génération Identitaire—clip de lancement sous-titré en anglais’ *YouTube*, accessed 5 January 2019, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4e7n7g1xAM>.
  - 3 John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 88.
  - 4 Just a few examples include: Camp Beauregard, Fort Benning, Fort Bragg and Fort Lee.
  - 5 G.W. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought: From Antiquity to the Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 4–59.
  - 6 In his writings, Evola often appropriates and uses terms from Hindi due to a belief that Eastern cultures have somehow maintained their traditionalism better than the West—using terms such as: *satya yuga*, *tréta yuga*, *dwapara yuga* and *kali yuga*. That said, far-right thinkers readily appropriate ‘traditionalist’ ideas from non-European countries as long as they reinforce oppressive and hierarchical power structures. Indeed, appropriation from Eastern cultures was present in Nazi occult ideology, including the use of the swastika.
  - 7 Theodore E. Mommsen, ‘Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages,’” *Speculum* 17, no. 2 (April 1942): 226–42.
  - 8 Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 2–13.
  - 9 Melissa Rossi, “Terror Attacks like El Paso Aim to Topple the Government, Experts Say,” *Yahoo News*, 6 August 2019. Archived 6 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190806150148/https://news.yahoo.com/terror-attacks-like-el-paso-aim-to-topple-the-government-experts-say-145010800.html>.
  - 10 Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018), 8.
  - 11 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 42.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 47.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 48.
  - 14 *Ibid.*
  - 15 *The Dave Pakman Show*, ‘White Nationalist Alt-Right Richard Spencer Sucker Punched, Won’t Denounce Hitler, Talks Jews’, *YouTube*, accessed 6 September 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cKNhjQHWFo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cKNhjQHWFo).
  - 16 Oliver Willis, ‘White Nationalist Group Headed By “Peaceful Ethnic Cleansing” Leader Holding Pro-Trump Conference in D.C.’, *Media Matters* (blog), 3 March 2016. Archived 29 April 2017. <http://web.archive.org/web/20170429012612/https://mediamatters.org/blog/2016/03/03/white-nationalist-group-headed-by-peaceful-ethn/208996>.

- 17 Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 42.
- 18 Joe Heim, "National Archives exhibit blurs images critical of President Trump," *The Washington Post*, 17 January 2020, [www.washingtonpost.com/local/national-archives-exhibit-blurs-images-critical-of-president-trump/2020/01/17/71d8e80c-37e3-11ea-9541-9107303481a4\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/national-archives-exhibit-blurs-images-critical-of-president-trump/2020/01/17/71d8e80c-37e3-11ea-9541-9107303481a4_story.html).
- 19 See Chapter 16 of this volume, 'The Rise and Fall of the Far Right in the Digital Age'.
- 20 Dinesh D'Souza, a former Reagan advisor, has also has made claims such as 'the American slave was treated like property, which is to say, pretty well', see Dinesh D'Souza, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 91.
- 21 Quoted in Dinesh D'Souza, *The End of Racism*, 3. pr, 91. Simms's book was published as *Hitler: A Global Biography* (Basic Books, 2019) in the United States and *Hitler: Only the World Was Enough* (Allen Lane, 2019) in the United Kingdom.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 See Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 1993).
- 25 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Religion and Post-modernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 26 Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought*, 248.
- 27 Edward Helmore, "Fox News Host Compares Migrants Entering US to Nazis," *The Guardian*, 15 August 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190815142233/https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/aug/15/fox-news-nation-todd-starnes-migrants-nazis-invasion>.
- 28 Richard Fletcher, *The Quest for El Cid* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 3.
- 29 Ibid., 4.
- 30 I have previously argued Franco's dictatorship was fascist, see Louie Dean Valencia-García, *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain: Clashing with Fascism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).
- 31 'La estatura del Cid,' *ABC* (Sevilla), 10 May 1955, 11.
- 32 'El monumento para perpetuar la reivindicación española de Gibraltar tendrá cinco metros de altura,' *ABC* (Madrid), 8 May 1955, 13.
- 33 See Ramón Menéndez Pidal's Introduction in (ed.), *Poema de mio Cid* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1958), 95–7. '[E]l poema del Cid no es nacional por el patriotismo que en él se manifieste, sino más bien como retrato del pueblo donde se escribió. En el Cid se reflejan las más nobles cualidades del pueblo que le hizo su héroe: el amor a la familia...; la fidelidad inquebrantable; la generosidad magnánima y altanera aun para con el Rey; la intensidad del sentimiento y la leal sobriedad de la expresión. Es hondamente nacional el espíritu democrático encarnado en ese 'buen vasallo que no tiene buen señor', en ese simple hidalgo, que, despreciado por la alta nobleza y abandonado de su Rey, lleva a cabo los más grandes hechos, somete todo el poder de Marruecos y ve a sus hijas llegar a ser reinas.... Este género de nacionalismo, menos enérgico, pero más amplio que el patriotismo militar del *Roland*, puede ser sentido más general y permanentemente y podrán repetirse siempre las palabras de Federico Schlegel: 'España, con el histórico poema de su Cid, tiene una ventaja peculiar sobre otras muchas naciones; es éste el género de poesía que influye más inmediata y eficazmente en el sentimiento nacional y en el carácter de un pueblo. Uno solo recuerdo cómo el del Cid es de más valor para una nación que toda una biblioteca llena de obras literarias hijas únicamente del ingenio y sin un contenido nacional'.

- 34 Parts of this section were adapted from a more pedagogically focused article published in *openDemocracy*, see Louie Dean Valencia-García, 'The Ups and Downs and Clashes of Western Civilization', 23 July 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190906170927/https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/ups-and-downs-and-clashes-western-civilization/>.
- 35 Manuel Marraco, "La Fiscalía No ve Delito de Odio En Las 'Abominables' Palabras de Javier Ortega Smith Sobre El Islamismo," *El País*, 3 July 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190906210513/https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2019/07/03/5d1c7f80fdddfec758b45e7.html>.
- 36 Edward Said, "A Window on the World," *The Guardian*, 1 August 2003, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130827055201/https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/aug/02/alqaida.highereducation>.
- 37 For more on the Proud Boys, see Alexandra Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-Right Is Warping the American Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2019).
- 38 Ozia Media, 'Who Are the Proud Boy in 60 Seconds' *YouTube*, accessed 5 February 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6wJa7FltyQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6wJa7FltyQ).
- 39 For a breakdown of a far-right terrorist incident and the ways Islamophobia functioned to motivate that attack see Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* (London: Zed Books, 2014).

**Part I**

# **Rewriting the Past**

The History of History and  
Alternate Timelines



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## 2 The Myth of the *Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*

### The Extreme Right and the American Revision of the History and Historiography of Medieval Spain<sup>1</sup>

*S.J. Pearce*

Since Washington Irving's embassy to Spain (1826–1829) and his subsequent publication of stories and essays collected under the title *Tales of the Alhambra*,<sup>2</sup> American readers, artists and politicians have imagined and drawn inspiration from the medieval period of Spain's history—before Spain was Spain, as such. Anglophone<sup>3</sup> fascination has continued through the contemporary period, often standing as a proxy for domestic issues, even in the United States, a country with no medieval national mythology of its own and a fraught contemporary relationship with both Spanish and Arabic, the modern languages that are the heirs to the languages of culture and state in Spain's Middle Ages. A proliferation of popular writing shows the appetite for medieval Spanish culture and history.<sup>4</sup> It also finds its way into political discourse, where it is held up as an aspiration of tolerance on the political left and an Islamic dystopia on the political right.<sup>5</sup> As any other societies of any other time and place, those of the Iberian Peninsula during the European Middle Ages were neither clearly one thing or the other: not a Boschian hellscape, but nor a garden of earthly delights. But as the peoples and places of medieval Spain enter contemporary Anglophone political discourse, the extreme right has seized upon the dystopian side of the coin in order to assail the scientific study of history and promote a presentist, anti-intellectual agenda that uses medieval history to promote its ideals for the modern world.

#### *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*

One recent contribution to the popular debates on the nature of interfaith conflict and coexistence in medieval Spain and its utility in contemporary political discourse is Darío Fernández-Morera's *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*.<sup>6</sup> The book argues that through the work of left-leaning academics, promulgated by ideologically sympathetic journalists and politicians, the medieval history of Spain<sup>7</sup> has been coopted anachronistically in the service of modern, liberal values such as racial diversity

and religious tolerance. It examines this ostensible phenomenon by trying to redefine two concepts that have long been veritable buzzwords in the study of al-Andalus: *convivencia* (literally: living-together-ness) and *reconquista* (reconquest). *Reconquista* represents an older historical model of medieval Spanish history that holds that Muslims conquered the Iberian Peninsula, drove the Visigothic rulers into the north where they bided their time until they and their descendants could reconquer the territory that was rightfully theirs.<sup>8</sup> This model is, by and large, no longer in use in scholarship because it is not supported by historical evidence and is, instead, a revision from the twelfth century and later used to justify the integrity of Spain as an ethnically and linguistically Castilian nation-state with Catholicism as the official (or, in the contemporary period, specially emphasised) religion.<sup>9</sup> However, the idea of a Catholic reconquest of Visigothic territories seized and held temporarily by Muslim invaders has an extensive afterlife in popular culture and politics.

The other buzzword is *convivencia*, literally nothing more or less than the state of Jews, Christians and Muslims living in close proximity in the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages. This term, however, has come to signify more than it did at its origins: *Convivencia* was first used in Spanish in the early seventeenth century to describe the political unification of Catholic principalities in medieval Spain.<sup>10</sup> In modern scholarship, it is first used to describe interreligious coexistence in the work of Julian Ribera and Ramón Menéndez Pidal, with the former describing *convivencia* as a set of shared intellectual interests and regular day-to-day contact that might eventually verge on 'solidarity' while recognising its fragility<sup>11</sup> and the latter writing about the possibility of *convivencia* between Christians and Muslims prior to the arrival of the Almoravids in the Iberian Peninsula,<sup>12</sup> a historical rupture which he saw as cutting off that possibility.<sup>13</sup> Menéndez Pidal also used the term to refer to the coexistence and competition of various types of vulgar Latin with Germanic languages and incipient Romance dialects in the Iberian Peninsula in the medieval period.<sup>14</sup> The term came to take on its most widely accepted usage with the 1948 publication of Américo Castro's field-defining *España en su historia*, where the word comes to refer to a syncretic and unitary culture in which Jews, Christians and Muslims participate.<sup>15</sup> Like many scholars of medieval Spanish literature who founded the discipline in North America, Castro was a republican refugee from Spain under Franco's rule, and his medieval Spain was quite distinct from the official, nationalist line of thought about the country's history.<sup>16</sup> There is a tendency to caricature Castro as a modern idealist and the idea of *convivencia* as a kind of friendly, pie-in-the-sky multiculturalism but this is not an accurate reading of his work and nor does it represent the current state of the field 70 years on, which seeks to explain the mechanisms of social and cultural interaction that result from the

incontrovertible fact of Jews, Christians and Muslims living together; contemporary scholarship does not seek to idealise that coexistence.<sup>17</sup> It also understands the concept of tolerance not as a kind of idealised harmonious coexistence of people of different faiths in a temporal and geographic environment, but rather as a deeply sub-optimal set of facts on the ground that people worked with, in and around; in other words, scholars of medieval Spain recognise that to be merely tolerated is not actually a desirable state of affairs for their subjects.<sup>18</sup> *Convivencia*, then, is a word that won't go away,<sup>19</sup> but it does not represent a kind of tolerant fantasia and nor does it govern the academic study of Jews, Christians and Muslims in medieval Spain.

The stated goal of *The Myth* is 'to demystify Islamic Spain by questioning the widespread belief that it was a wonderful place of tolerance and *convivencia* of three cultures under the benevolent supervision of enlightened Muslim rulers'<sup>20</sup> and to pull back the supposed veil of positive portrayals of medieval Spanish society 'to show a humanity both suffering and inflicting suffering'.<sup>21</sup> In short, Fernández-Morera aims to replace the utopian, progressive view that he incorrectly imagines dominating scholarly discourse in an academic field that is not his own<sup>22</sup> with a dystopian one of his own invention. By cherry-picking evidence, relying on outdated and explicitly partisan scholarship, adopting a messianic and omniscient authorial voice, and misrepresenting his opponents in order to argue against straw men he can vanquish rather than flesh-and-blood ones he cannot, Fernández-Morera uses the case of medieval Spain to further an explicitly extreme right-wing and conservative Christian political and cultural agenda as it bears upon debates about politics, the establishment of religion and the very place of the academy in civic life.<sup>23</sup>

Fernández-Morera explicitly aligns his work with the political right when he sets himself and his project of medieval cultural history in opposition to

the critical construction of a diverse, tolerant, and happy Islamic Spain... part of an effort to sell a particular cultural agenda, which would have been undermined by the recognition of a multicultural society wracked by ethnic, religious, social, and political conflicts that eventually contributed to its demise — a multicultural society held together only by the ruthless power of autocrats and clerics... In the past few decades, this ideological mission has morphed into 'presentism', an academically sponsored effort to narrate the past in terms of the present and thereby reinterpret it to serve contemporary 'multicultural', 'diversity', and 'peace' studies, which *necessitate rejecting as retrograde, chauvinistic, or, worse, 'conservative', any views of the past that may conflict with the progressive agenda.*<sup>24</sup>



Here Fernández-Morera casts the academy as the bogeyman without explaining the mechanisms by which it has allegedly been able to achieve all that he claims and thereby sets himself up to slay a shadowy, ill-defined, behind-the-scenes, liberal historiographic manipulator; he never identifies or explains the nature of the academic sponsorship that he sees operating in this way. He also highlights as mere buzzwords particular ideas and values that have been traditional bugbears of the right wing; and he claims adherence to those values necessarily requires a falsification of history, one which he is uniquely situated to rectify. His beef with a liberal academy<sup>25</sup> is long-standing: In 1996 he authored a volume entitled *American Academia and the Survival of Marxist Ideas*, which casts the majority of academic work as a kind of self-serving Orwellian double-think that operates in the service of liberal political ideas and was initially forged by Marxist ideology<sup>26</sup>; this approach to scholarship shows through in *The Myth*.

In addition to criticising liberal ideas and values, Fernández-Morera situates his historiographical approach on the political new right through his explicit aim of vindicating Spain's Catholic past in a way that closely mirrors and brings to an Anglophone audience the historiographical jiu-jitsu of Francisco Franco's nationalist dictatorship, which is articulated clearly in the preamble to the Law of 24 November 1939 creating the Spanish National Research Council. This law, signed into effect by Francisco Franco himself, establishes the council in order to defend Spanish history against Enlightenment thought and the diversity of opinion:

At the most decisive crossroads of history, the Hispanic people concentrated its energies toward the creation of a universal culture. This must also be the noblest ambition of Spain in the current moment which, facing poverty and the paralysis of the past, feels the will to renew its glorious scientific tradition. Such an endeavor must, above all else, have its foundations in the restoration of the classical and Christian unity of the sciences that was destroyed in the eighteenth century...A counterweight must be put in place to balance against the single-minded overspecialization of our epoch, returning the sciences instead to their regimen of public access, which implies a return to the imperatives of planning and hierarchy. In conclusion, order and the essential ideas that inspired our Glorious Movement must be imposed upon this culture so that the purest lessons of the universal and Catholic tradition may be brought to bear upon the exigencies of modernity.<sup>27</sup>

The Spanish National Research Council was thus founded as an academic arm of the Falange and put to the task of undoing the supposed damage of modernity, secularism, academic specialisation and the Enlightenment; of the 'restoration of the classical and Christian tradition' to

a place from which it could govern scientific investigation; and vindicating through academic writing the cultural values represented by Franco's movement.<sup>28</sup> Fernández-Morera articulates similar goals for his project of restoring Spanish history to a traditional view that upholds Christians as the rightful inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula when he declares that 'the Christian Hispano-Roman civilization in the early eighth century was superior to that of the North African Berber invaders'.<sup>29</sup> The language of the restoration of traditional values and religion is particular to extreme right political thought, both in Franco's era and in the contemporary period.<sup>30</sup> In particular for the Spanish case, vindicating an eternally and inherently Catholic Spain requires subscribing to a vision of Castilian (linguistic and ethnic) hegemony that is simply historically inaccurate, flattening out all kinds of Christian religious identities and praxes along with the non-Christian ones.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, in this statement of purpose, Fernández-Morera signs on to the presentist brand of history he claims to abhor and, furthermore, demonstrates that he is undertaking the kind of qualitative value judgement that is not part of the purview of the academic practice of history. I highlight this in order to situate Fernández-Morera's work within the long twentieth-century history of his kind of project that sets out with the goal of vindicating and elevating Christian Spain in the service of very explicit political commitments, in spite of Fernández-Morera's claim that his work and thinking are apolitical.<sup>32</sup> The task of the historian is not to prove the superiority of one civilisation or culture over another, and nor is history as a discipline equipped to pass that kind of judgement; that is the role of the politician, the propagandist, the polemicist. And in this case, the historian behind *The Myth* is promoting propaganda traditionally associated with the Spanish far-right.

Fernández-Morera additionally situates the book on the political right through his choice of publisher: ISI Books is the publishing wing of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, a think tank that counts itself as one of the founding groups of twentieth-century conservative political thought and promotes 'teaching students like you the core ideas behind the free market, the American Founding, and Western civilization, ideas that are rarely taught in your classroom'.<sup>33</sup> Among its core principles is 'traditional values', which it defines as 'the values, customs, conventions, and norms of the Judeo-Christian tradition that inform and guide a free society. Without such ordinances, society induces its decay by embracing a relativism that rejects an objective moral order'.<sup>34</sup> Both of the civilisational frameworks mentioned in this statement, Western civilisation<sup>35</sup> and Judeo-Christian<sup>36</sup> civilisation, are increasingly important to both the academic and popular right in that they both enshrine Enlightenment-period ideas about the character of nations and religious groups and then project these ideas backwards in ways that often uphold Christian-supercessionist and white-supremacist ideas of national and

individual identity.<sup>37</sup> And in fact, in the last page of the work Fernández-Morera makes explicit the fear of losing a superior, Christian, Western civilisation that guides his historiographical misadventure:

Without the Christian resistance and eventual Reconquest, first against the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba and then against the Berber Almoravid and Almohad empires, the Spain of today could well be an extension of the cultures of North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>38</sup>

Fernández-Morera's counterfactual speculation is reflective of the fear of non-white and Muslim immigration to and presence in the West that characterises the ideologies of the new extreme right.<sup>39</sup>

Politics and religion aside, Fernández-Morera's project falls victim to a major flaw in its very conceptualisation: There is no serious scholar working today, on any point of the political spectrum, who thinks that al-Andalus was any kind of 'paradise'. *The Myth's* myth is itself a myth. By challenging an imagined narrative of peaceful, happy, multicultural tolerance with a narrative of Islamic depravity and Catholic supremacy, he is not really substituting a badly constructed narrative with the correct one but instead replaces one fiction with another that better suits his political and cultural commitments. As David Nirenberg has observed, 'When we turn to history — medieval or any other — in order to demonstrate the exemplary virtues of a given culture or religious tradition in comparison with another, we are often re-creating the dynamics we claim to be transcending'.<sup>40</sup> In this case, Fernández-Morera is replacing his perception of a left-wing fantasy with his own right-wing and Catholic fantasy; rather than replacing a fiction with inconvenient truths, he is in fact attempting to replace one fantastical narrative with another, casting scholars of medieval Spain as the cartoon villains in this scenario for an audience primed for the image and fantasy of the liberal, academic, historiographic scoundrel.<sup>41</sup>

### A Scholarly Critique and Corrective

Chief among Fernández-Morera's historiographic villains is the 2002 popular literary history, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*.<sup>42</sup> *Ornament* is a history of literature and culture—and not of politics, economics, war, or even of religion per se—that offers readers case studies of individual writers and thinkers whose work exemplifies the kinds of natural learning and synergistic literary culture that develops when people who speak different languages and practice different faiths but value literature, thought, and knowledge all the same live together in a place, whether they like it, or each other, or not. Menocal's

'culture of tolerance' is this, rather than the peaceful, pleasant, happy mode of existence that it is often misrepresented to be. The book has become something of a lightning rod amongst scholars who study the history of the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages. Many of the academic critiques of *Ornament* come at it obliquely, critiquing it not for what it is, but treating it as something that it is not: Reviews tend to react as if it were a bad political history rather than assessing it as a literary history, and tend to critique it as if it were an academic book and not as one meant for a popular audience.<sup>43</sup>

Like *Ornament*, *The Myth* is a trade book written for a general audience. Unlike *Ornament*, however, it invokes the contemporary academy and academic historians as its archvillains; and so although it is not the correct approach to judge a popular book by scholarly standards, it is necessary to consider scholarly approaches in writing about *The Myth*, its rhetoric, and its politics in order to address the author's claims that academic malfeasance underpins the argument he opposes with his own. In other words, this essay is not principally an assessment of where *The Myth* falls short of the standards of academic historiography (although it will also certainly demonstrate that), but rather of the extent to which it misuses and misrepresents the academic study of medieval Spain in order to be able to position itself as the lone voice of truth in the publishing wilderness while simultaneously promoting a wildly inaccurate vision of medieval Spain. Fernández-Morera seeks to distinguish himself from other 'recent scholars in the English-speaking world' whom he does not identify, who 'have not adopted the approach of the present book, which looks at these cultures synchronically and comparatively, examining literary, historical, legal, religious, biographical, archaeological, and other cultural materials in order to show a humanity both suffering and inflicting suffering'.<sup>44</sup> In fact, this is a completely inaccurate representation of the present state of the field, in which scholars do all of those things, but without the desire to prove a preconceived notion about human suffering. His methodology as he explains it, then, is to utilise the approaches of current scholars, but to arrive at different conclusions, hardly the fulsome rejection of the academy that the work claims to be.<sup>45</sup> Even though he rejects and then accepts current scholarly methods, Fernández-Morera ultimately chooses to replace scholarly approaches almost completely with rhetoric from the extreme political right that he then leaves unsupported by evidence.

The remainder of this essay will identify and analyse a sample of the rhetorical techniques and historiographical strategies that Fernández-Morera employs to misrepresent this history and historiography of al-Andalus in order to appeal to a politically right-wing and extreme right-wing readership with particular attention to chapter 6, 'The Truth about the Jewish Community's Golden Age', as a case study representative of the book as a whole. In addition to peppering his work with very fundamental and simple errors of fact, he cites and attempts to analyse sources that he cannot

read in the original, thereby limiting his understanding of the situation to texts that have been translated—that is to say, filtered through the interpretation of at least one other reader; he disregards the way that genre works to create culturally and temporally specific meaning in texts; misunderstands the nature of religion as a category in the Middle Ages; relies upon modern stereotypes of religions and their adherents; and ignores and misrepresents the state of the field all the while claiming to debunk the current state of that selfsame field. Through a series of counterexamples drawn from a wider panorama of medieval sources than Fernández-Morera uses and a more comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the field, this essay will demonstrate the character and extent of his selective reading and interpretation as well as the ways in which the ‘interpretive stance’<sup>46</sup> of *The Myth* serves extreme right-wing political needs while claiming to be a neutral response to left-wing political interference in historiography. This critique will stand as a representative sample of the ways in which the rhetoric and modes of historical thinking popular on the political right come to bear in this work in the hope that it will reach some of Fernández-Morera’s readers and serve as a resource in discussions of these themes with students and other lay readers.

### **Misrepresenting Popular and Scholarly Writing about al-Andalus**

Fernández-Morera fosters the misconception amongst his lay readers that there is no need to engage with the previous work on a topic in order to write a new history.<sup>47</sup> Even beyond the standards, practices and norms of academic history writing, *The Myth* is meant to be a work of history with an embedded historiographic critique of the field; to do so honestly requires engaging with the field as it is and not partially, incorrectly or in a caricatured form. In other words, in order to make the claim that nobody writes about a certain topic or that all scholars have a particular bias or blind spot, the critic must be sure that this is the case rather deducing it because he is not aware of the work on that topic or overlooked it because it does not conform to his argument or has not yet been translated into a language he can read. Yet this is precisely what Fernández-Morera does: He claims that many subjects are unexplored that in fact have an extensive body of literature. By doing so, he seeks to elevate his own stature to that of the proverbial truth-telling prophet rejected in his own land—in this case the academy—for his frank assessment of the ills of society.<sup>48</sup> In order to accomplish this elevation of his own stature, Fernández-Morera misrepresents both academic and popular writing about al-Andalus; in this section I will offer two examples of the latter and then incorporate examples of the former throughout the rest of the chapter.

Throughout *The Myth*, Fernández-Morera seeks to strengthen his position as the sole truth-teller about medieval Spain to popular audiences, ‘revealing’ facts that academics seek to keep hidden from a

general readership; in doing so, he shows that his own role in the historiographic discourse to be of greater import to him than the historiography itself. In the course of criticising the Umayyads for cultivating a culture wholly derivative of the Visigothic one, he writes that ‘the flowering of Islamic art in Spain took advantage of the nonrepresentational aspects of Hispano-Roman-Visigoth art. Famously, Muslims adopted the Visigoth horseshoe arch seen in many Islamic buildings’.<sup>49</sup> In the footnote to this sentence and the subsequent note, he goes on to lament not being the first one to notice this—a fascinating rhetorical move that illustrates that his chief interest is in being the lone voice in the wilderness and not in the full exposition of Andalusí history and historiography:

I thought I had been the first to point this out, in an earlier version of this chapter, but then Horgel Michiels e-mailed me to say that it had already been noticed, as indeed it was, by Ernest T. Dewald, ‘The Appearance of the Horseshoe Arch in Western Europe’, *American Journal of Archeology* 26:3 (July-September 1922): 316–37. That the Muslim conquerors dopted the Visitgoth horseshoe arch is common knowledge among Spanish art historians, though Arabists and historians of Islamic art regularly ignore it. For remaining examples of the Visigoth horseshoe arch, see among others the church of San Juan de Baños. These horseshoe arches have a peralte of one half of the radius of the circumference, as does the ‘Muslim’ arch — or, put otherwise, the stones that form the arch go over the 180 degrees of the imaginary circumference of the arch. No Catholic churches were left in southern Spain after the Muslim tide retreated.<sup>50</sup>

In these two notes, he creates the impression that this was noticed in 1922 and ignored until he could recover it, ignoring the state of play in the academic fields not only of Spanish art history but also of Arabo-Islamic history, historiography and art history, where the place of the horseshoe arch is so well-known and oft-repeated as to be something of a cliché. And furthermore, he tries to maintain his status as first-at-something in an interview he gave to promote the book, in which he concedes that this is not an idea original to him but claims to be the first person to share the idea with a general, non-academic readership: ‘People don’t know that. You have to ask a specialist about those things’.<sup>51</sup> In fact, knowledge about the provenance of the horseshoe arch in Islamic and Islamicate architecture in Spain is widely known both in specialised and popular publications; as an example of the latter one can cite Menocal’s lavishly illustrated book *The Arts of Intimacy*, book co-authored with historian Abigail Balbale and art historian Jerilynn Dodds for an educated lay audience, which explains the origins of the horseshoe arch in Spain, offers many photographic examples of its presence in Visigothic contexts that still survive to this day.<sup>52</sup> In sum, Fernández-Morera is not invested in

an accurate representation of Andalus history or the historiography that allows us to know about it; rather, he is interested in building himself up as a historiographical hero at all costs: including at a cost of the truth.<sup>53</sup>

But Fernández-Morera's misrepresentation of the state of the field goes beyond the purely self-serving to the erroneous and the deceptive for the sake of sustaining his political argument. In at least one case, he tries to pass off sloppy right-wing popular writing about the subject as sloppy left-wing writing about the subject in order to further his political agenda. Epigrams are one of the key ways in which Fernández-Morera introduces his opponents' perspectives and then refutes them in the body of his work:

As the epigraphs in this chapter indicate, it is widely believed that Islam granted to Spain's Jewish community, composed largely of Sephardic Jews [sic, see above], a substantial degree of liberty and tolerance. According to this view, the idyllic life for Spain's Jews was interrupted by the invasion of the 'fanatical' Almoravids and Almohads, and later by the 'intolerant' Christian kingdoms during the Spanish Reconquista. However, the fact of the matter is that the life enjoyed by the Sephardim, within and without their communities, was full of limitations long before the invasion of the Almoravids and Almohads, and that the Catholic kingdoms eventually became a place of refuge for Jewish families.<sup>54</sup>

However, by bowdlerising<sup>55</sup> the texts he cites and misrepresenting the political interests of their publishers he calls into question his ability or willingness to represent sources fairly and accurately; and, furthermore, he undermines his own argument that nostalgia for a pleasant al-Andalus is the exclusive province of liberal academics and like-minded actors in media and politics.

The first epigram of chapter six, for example, is drawn from the article 'Sephardim' on the web site Jewish Virtual Library.<sup>56</sup> It contains a brief overview of the history of Jews in Spain before moving on to its main topic, the Sephardi diaspora; it ostensibly illustrates the attitudes of the mainstream, liberal scholars against whose work Fernández-Morera sets his own. The quoted passage reads: 'The era of Muslim rule in Spain (8th-11th century) was considered the "Golden Age" for Spanish Jewry. Jewish intellectuals and spiritual life flourished and many Jews served in Spanish courts. Jewish economic expansion was unparalleled'.<sup>57</sup> An examination of the article in its entirety reveals it to be compromised by erroneous information on both the small-detail and big-picture scales. Some of the errors are relatively minor (although not insignificant) such as giving the date of the conquest of Toledo by Alfonso VI as 1089 instead of 1085 and implying that Muslim rule ended in the Iberian Peninsula in the eleventh century. But other errors reveal a

broader misunderstanding of the religious history of al-Andalus, misunderstandings upon which Fernández-Morera is willing to hang his own argument. Of greatest consequence for the political and religious stakes of Fernández-Morera's book is an erroneous description in the article of the evolution of Christian belief in Visigothic Spain: Following an explanation of Visigoths' religious beliefs, namely that they adhered to the apostolic Arian Christian faith before converting en masse to Catholicism in the year 587,<sup>58</sup> the article's section on Visigothic rule concludes with the assertion that 'in 638 C.E., the Arian Visigoths declared that "only Catholics could live in Spain"',<sup>59</sup> thereby demonstrating a fundamental misunderstanding of the religious sea-change that took place by virtue of that conversion of and the incompatibility of Arian and Catholic belief on the part of the author of the article. By selecting this article as the source for his epigram Fernández-Morera can seemingly support his contention that writing on medieval Spain ignores or misrepresents Christian history although this is in fact a broader pattern of errors in the article 'Sephardim' and not exclusive to the history and theology of Christianity. Some bad work will always be published regardless of its politics; that does not make it representative of the state of the field or the quality of its scholarship as a whole. And as a popularising encyclopaedia article, it is also not representative of the kinds of academic studies with which Fernández-Morera claims to be taking issue. But beyond choosing a weak, straw-man adversary in the form of this encyclopaedia article, Fernández-Morera has chosen one from a site that makes its political leanings clear; and they are not ones that support his overall argument about the liberal biases of the academic study of medieval Spain. The Jewish Virtual Library is digital encyclopaedia project of the non-profit organisation American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise; its web site fawningly sports quotations from right-of-centre politicians Benjamin Netanyahu<sup>60</sup> and Donald Trump speaking in their capacities as the heads of their respective governments.<sup>61</sup> Rather than illustrating that liberal professors are the sole source of his pernicious imagined myth of al-Andalus as a paradise he instead shows that positive portrayals of Islamic Spain can also be promoted in popular sources supported by right-wing political and religious organisations and that those idealised portrayals can be made to serve right-wing agendas. He has taken an example of sloppy writing about the topic from a right-wing web site and implicitly passed it off as an example of what is wrong with left-wing popular writing on the topic.

In sum, *The Myth* claims to be a critique of an academic field of study gone far of the rails, but this is an argument that can only be sustained through a variety of misrepresentations of that field and the outright and explicit dismissal of its value. The book is not what it claims to be but is rather a critique of something that does not exist as portrayed; in other words, the Cervantista at the heart of it all is driven mad by fictions of a



lost Spain, has outfitted himself as a hero in old and tattered gear and is now tilting at windmills that are giants in his mind only.

### A Multilingual Middle Ages and a Monolingual Modernity

Central to Fernández-Morera's methodology is 'special attention to primary sources' which, he claims, 'in modern publications on Islamic Spain frequently are not a part of the narrative and often not even part of the notes'. The reader of this chapter is encouraged to consult any of the books and articles referenced in the notes here to see the extent to which scholars do, indeed, rely upon primary sources for their analysis, presenting them to their readers so that those readers can engage completely with the material and the scholars' analysis of it; this is yet another respect in which Fernández-Morera's assessment of his competition and of his book's role in filling a lacuna in the scholarship is inaccurate. Furthermore, Fernández-Morera's own presentation of primary sources is fragmentary and selective at best and actively misleading at worst. And finally, the rhetoric surrounding his presentation of the primary sources is evocative of the language used in right-wing political and reportorial discourse, only further highlighting the lie of Fernández-Morera's claim to neutrality and his professed rejection of presentism.

To begin at the end, when Fernández-Morera explains erroneously that he includes in his work a representative panorama of primary sources so that readers can 'decide for themselves whether the widespread hagiographic interpretations of Islamic Spain are warranted or not',<sup>62</sup> he uses language that echoes Fox News' recently retired slogan: 'We report, you decide'. Journalistic watchdog agencies challenged the news network for promoting reporter opinion in three-quarters of news stories even in the face of that slogan,<sup>63</sup> which was ultimately exchanged for the more transparent tag line, 'opinion done right'.<sup>64</sup> On the face of it, the idea of presenting a spate of evidence to readers and allowing them to draw their own conclusions is a noble goal and one of the foundations of good scholarship and good public writing. However, in the current political moment, the language of 'decide for yourself' has come to connote protesting a bit too much in defence of right-wing opinions masquerading as truth; and it is impossible not to hear such protest echoing in the pages of *The Myth*, particularly given the very real limitations of Fernández-Morera's presentation of those sources.

The question of sources from a place and moment in history as multilingual as medieval Spain necessarily raises the question about language usage. Fernández-Morera assures his readers that he will be sharing sources with them 'verbatim'.<sup>65</sup> By using this word, Fernández-Morera seeks to assure the reader that he is presenting the texts exactly as they were written and the reader therefore has direct access to medieval

thought. However, all the texts appear in English translation, and so at their very essence none of the quotations are verbatim renderings. It is axiomatic that translation is always an act of interpretation; and so the texts as they are presented to the reader are always refracted through an interpretive lens. This will always be a concern for any book that cites non-English text for an Anglophone audience; however, Fernández-Morera elevates his own work with text by ignoring or denying the problems that translation can pose rather than by addressing them head-on, ultimately promising his readers something that he cannot deliver.

Although Fernández-Morera gives no indication of being able to read Arabic, that does not stop him from taking up analysis based upon the specific and language of the sources—in translation. The inaccessibility to the author of the primary sources makes his analytical exercise—in philology? close reading? It's hard to know what to call the practice of putting pressure on a single word in translation—both futile and ridiculous. For example, Fernández-Morera frames the arrival of Umayyad forces in the Iberian Peninsula in the early to mid-eighth century in terms of *jihād*, an Islamic concept that is often rendered in English as 'struggle in the path of God' and can include everything from programs of personal improvement on the part of individual believers to out-and-out holy war.<sup>66</sup> Fernández-Morera notes that 'it is important to examine the way in which the concept of jihad as a religiously motivated war was understood in the Muslim legal texts and other Andalusian sources of the time'.<sup>67</sup> In this respect, Fernández-Morera is correct: In order to understand a religio-legal concept, it is necessary to view it both as it is delineated in sacred and legal texts as well as how it was implemented in practice; however, that is not what his discussion does. Let me set out the absurdity of his exercise in plain terms: Fernández-Morera is attempting to refine the standard definition of a term in a language that he cannot read. Instead, he makes wildly unfounded claims that Andalusian texts only ever use the term *jihād* to mean waging holy war, citing not the texts themselves but rather secondary sources such as dictionary definitions, and simply ignoring the texts that do deal with *jihād* in its other senses. For example, he ignores the presence of Sufis in al-Andalus who very much treated *jihād* as a spiritual exercise and wrote about it in those terms, as well as the heterodox discussions that took place amongst various stakeholders about the aims and privileges of *jihād* as a practice of war that was as much about practical political considerations as religious ones.<sup>68</sup> Where Fernández-Morera claims that 'the infidel had practically no right in this struggle; the Muslim has every right', scholars have shown, through careful reading of primary sources that are off Fernández-Morera's radar screen, that Muslim *mujāhidūn* often partnered with non-Muslims against Muslims in order to make gains that were material, practical and spiritual in different measures. It is not just that Fernández-Morera's single-minded focus on legal sources

means that he paints a picture of life in al-Andalus as it might have been mandated by law rather than how it played out in practice, but rather that he selects sources that support his claim, ignores the ones that challenge it as well as the ones that he cannot read and tells his readers that he is giving them all the evidence, carefully analysed. He is not giving his readers all the evidence and it is certainly not carefully analysed.

The language barrier means that *The Myth* simply cannot engage with sources on their own terms, in spite of Fernández-Morera's insistence that that is what he is doing. In her review of the volume, Maribel Fierro writes straightforwardly about the implications of working only with translations in this case:

What he has not consulted — because, with a few exceptions that Fernández-Morera appears to have overlooked, they are not available in translation — are the compilations of fatwas, which is where he would have discovered the jurists' great efforts to contextualize doctrine in specific circumstances.<sup>69</sup>

He can't analyse the words and doesn't have access to the whole panorama of sources; the translated ones are not representative of the corpus as a whole. Yet Fernández-Morera defends his oligolinguistic approach, claiming that recourse to texts in the original languages is irrelevant. He writes that the myth of tolerance 'can hardly be explained by linguistic ignorance, since the primary medieval Latin, Spanish, Arabic and Hebrew sources required for a good general understanding of Islamic Spain have been translated into accessible Western languages'<sup>70</sup> and that those who cannot read sources in the original

can find consolation in the fact that they are no worse off than the celebrated Córdoba Muslim cleric Ibn Rushd ('Averroes'), a polymath who achieved lasting fame by commenting on the technical and difficult texts of Aristotle without knowing Greek and after reading them in twice-mediated translations.<sup>71</sup>

As Fierro has noted, it is not just a question of reading texts as they come down to us rather than mediated through a translation, but is also a question of having full access to the full range of sources that still exist; as medievalists we regularly face the fact that many sources from our period simply have not survived to modernity for a range of causes, from simple degradation of the physical materials, to poor cataloguing and access, to the seizure and destruction of collections and archives during war, to Inquisitorial and state censorship policies. Because of this we do not have the luxury of defining our textual corpora in such a way that ignores the relatively limited amount of material that does still exist. And in spite of Fernández-Morera's appeal to Averroes'

commentary on Aristotle, it must be noted that standards and practices in all sorts of fields have changed and been updated quite dramatically since the twelfth century: I cannot speak for Fernández-Morera, but I myself would not want my medical care to be based on nothing more than Averroes' medical writings and practice as a physician; why should best practices in the humanities warrant less?

### The (Dis)Function of Sources and Genres

In addition to misreading the sources by virtue of not being able to read them directly, Fernández-Morera ignores the role of genre in analysing the texts that form the basis of his work. Historians and scholars of the literature of medieval Spain—just as all historians and literary critics—use different types of sources to answer different types of questions: For example, business documents are a better measure of medieval economies than letters by poets complaining that their patrons have not paid them for their poetry. As much as Fernández-Morera would like to deny it, historical chronicles often go beyond simply recounting what happened and instead reflect the perspective of the author<sup>72</sup>; and even a text that might seem as clear-cut as a religious polemic might serve just as well to tell us about how, for example, a Muslim cleric sought to unite his own community as much or more than as he was trying to disprove Christianity or Judaism. Fernández-Morera's own book is a case in point that a work of history can claim to be one thing while in fact being another beast entirely. However, he ignores questions of genre and of audience and instead draws upon categories of sources that cannot provide the kind of information that will really support his claims. Instead he consistently asks sources to do things that they cannot do, and then declares victory over them and over their earlier readers when they fail to do those very things.<sup>73</sup>

One example comes in the form of his treatment of the life of the poet-vizier Samuel ibn Naghrīla, (d. 1055–6) who rose to prominence in the emirate of Granada, then ruled by the Zirid dynasty, a group with its origins in North Africa. In Granada, Ibn Naghrīla served as a vizier and general to the Muslim emir of the kingdom of Granada but was also the leader, or *nagid*, of that city's Jewish community and the best of its poets. He earned himself the nickname 'twice the vizier' for his military and poetic prowess. His poetry covers topics from fatherhood to the battlefield to the value of both healthy and pleasing foods; some of his most significant poems were written to and about his beloved son Yehosef who would succeed him as both the *nagid* and a government official in Granada. Samuel's own writings and those that survive that tell his story from others' perspectives demonstrate that he was deeply engaged with both Jewish and Muslim thinkers and cultural leaders of the day and with their ideas. His poetry is secular in nature but written

in what medieval Jews considered to be the divine language—Hebrew—and drew often and strongly on biblical and other religious language, all the while using the rhyme and meter schemes of his Arabic-speaking Muslim counterparts.<sup>74</sup> By connecting the biblical roots of Hebrew poetry with the Arabic-language realities of his day, Ibn Naghrīla was able to demonstrate, through his poetry, that he was a full participant in his Jewish community and in the courtly society of the Islamic emirate of Granada. The sources show us over and over again that he was respected as a leader by his fellow Jews and an administrator by his Muslim counterparts at court; the reader of *The Myth* would never know that, though.

Ibn Naghrīla's life is very well documented in a range of sources written during his life, immediately following his death, and more distant in time after that. All of these sources, written in Hebrew and Arabic, fall within specific genres of Arabic and Arabising Hebrew literature. And so, as much as Fernández-Morera would like to take these sources simply at face value, doing so means the loss of a great deal of literary and historical contextual information embedded in the conventions of the genres. The stylised conventions of genre are an important part of a text both of what they can tell us when they are adhered to and especially when they are transgressed. Fernández-Morera's apparently lack of familiarity with several important genres of Arabic literature (or at a charitable minimum, his unwillingness to engage with those generic categories) makes it impossible for him to grapple with those texts or present them to his reader. Fernández-Morera claims that Abū Ishāq of Elvira's satirical poem full of invective against Jews as one that 'reflects popular Andalusian views about "the power of the Jews"'.<sup>75</sup> He does this simply by presenting the text as a self-evident denunciation of Jewish power rather than engaging with the rhetoric and the highly formulaic Arabic poetics that governed the writing of such compositions and in fact allowed Muslim poets to make far more detailed and sophisticated arguments about the religious landscape of their world.<sup>76</sup> Not only does he treat poetry as a straightforward historical chronicle, he omits the entire oeuvre of Ibn Naghrīla himself: In other words, he wants poetry to serve as history but has no interest in hearing Ibn Naghrīla's version of it.<sup>77</sup> Ibn Naghrīla, who lived many lives in the many sources, medieval and modern, that describe him, is here made into a voiceless historical pawn in Fernández-Morera's historiographical chess game. After cherry-picking evidence, close-reading texts as if they were not a product of their time and place, and conflating individuals into a faceless mass on the basis of a shared religion rather than shared traits, Fernández-Morera deals Ibn Naghrīla a historiographic coup-de-grace by failing to treat him as a writer himself.

By way of a second example, law codes, Fernández-Morera's genre of particular interest, are a specific kind of writing that must be read

as aspirational rather than strictly reflective of reality on the ground. Any reader who has ever ridden in a car travelling faster than the posted speed limit knows this to be true. As a corporate body, twenty-first-century denizens of the United States largely aspire to be members of a society in which people drive with the necessary caution when operating a fast, heavy machine with the potential to kill. Speed limit laws are in place to promote this ideal and to try to effect it as an outcome; the fact that the laws are in place does not mean that they are always obeyed. That laws, legal theories and rulings existed to separate and render identifiable members of different religious groups certainly do reflect what today we might call a closed-minded or discriminatory approach, as Fernández-Morera notes, again engaging in a bit of the presentism he so protests. However, they neither represent the totality of legal theory, as per Fernández-Morera's selective approach, nor do they represent the application of legal theory in life as it was lived by average people day-to-day, the life that Fernández-Morera claims to want to focus on.<sup>78</sup>

Yet Fernández-Morera makes a show of his superficial readings of the texts that do not take into account genre, evidence or historical context. He explains that 'without "questioning" or "interrogating" the "subjectivities" of the scholars of the Maliki school of jurisprudence in al-Andalus, this book takes seriously and at face value their interpretations and practices'.<sup>79</sup> What Fernández-Morera is, in effect, describing here is an interpretive strategy called *close reading*. This technique, pioneered by the literary-critical school known as The New Criticism, which flourished during the 1940s and 1950s, considers only the language of the text and nothing external to it—it does not consider the role of the author or any events that the text might respond to.<sup>80</sup> In other words, this is not any kind of methodological innovation on Fernández-Morera's part; but more seriously, it is not an approach that is well-suited to the legal and other documentary and historical sources that Fernández-Morera seeks to centre in his narrative nor to the kind of cultural history he seeks to write. Law codes, legal rulings and other juridical documents have roots and an impact in a historical moment and a place that cannot be separated from the text itself; and those sources, especially the prescriptive ones, do not necessarily tell us what was happening on the ground. At the same time, Fernández-Morera also wisely cautions his readers to 'keep in mind that the texts examined are "historically situated constructs", a term that he cannot let slide into his own writing without pointing out that it is "modern critical jargon"'.<sup>81</sup> In explaining his approach, Fernández-Morera uses scare quotes to affect a tone of mockery not just towards select text-critical methodologies but towards the idea of methodology at all. He tries to have it both ways and misleads his non-academic readers by trying to persuade them that it is possible to arrive at a historical truth through the unfiltered reading of unvarnished text while also conceding that all texts have biases and are often written

under the constraints of genre, time and place that do render them subjective and in need of Fernández-Morera's dreaded 'interrogation' in order to understand them well.<sup>82</sup>

### Misunderstanding Religion in General and Specific Terms

Even though he writes about Judaism, Christianity and Islam and their adherents in the Middle Ages and assures his readers that his work 'does not pass judgment on today's Muslims, Jews, or Christians, or on their religions',<sup>83</sup> Fernández-Morera uses the modern understanding of those religions and of religion as a category in order to support his preconceived notions about their development and practice in the medieval period. The notions of religion as a category, and as a category separable from the civil, and determined by one's personal, internal beliefs and identity—all assumptions that are present in Fernández-Morera's discussions of religion—are both wholly modern and grounded in Christianity. *Religion* is neither a theological category nor a native, organic one.<sup>84</sup> 'The very conception of religion... [was] opened up by a number of early modern scholars, both Catholics and Protestants'.<sup>85</sup> And so to assess medieval Judaism and Islam as 'religions' is to assess them according to the standards of modern, Christian faith, theology and history: presentism, indeed. To be sure, scholars of medieval Judaism and Islam use the term regularly, but the best scholarship is aware of the incompatibility of the terminology and the context, and accounts for it.<sup>86</sup> As a consequence, the discussion of religion generally and of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in particular in *The Myth* imposes modernity upon the Middle Ages and fails to get at the heart of the subject.

Fernández-Morera characterises, in part, the history of religion in medieval Spain as a zero-sum game that pits Jews against Christians. Fernández-Morera claims that historians care too much about the histories of Muslims—and especially of Jews—and not nearly enough about what he views as what should be the standard historical narrative, that is, one that gives pride of place to Christians and Christian societies: 'Some recent scholars in the English-speaking world have done excellent work, but with the exception of Emmet Scott<sup>87</sup> they have either concerned themselves mainly with the Jewish experience or not adopted the approach of the present book...'<sup>88</sup> This bitter criticism demands engagement. Rather than taking a survey of the field, determining that there is not enough focus on Christian minorities<sup>89</sup> for his liking and then carrying out a study to remedy the lacuna he has identified, Fernández-Morera instead criticises his colleagues for focusing too much on Jews. Fundamentally, this complaint is based upon two false premises: First, that the study of medieval Spain is limited endeavour in which any attention paid to Jews and Jewish history detracts from Christians and Christian history. And built upon this first premise is a

second, namely that the cultures in which Christians participated could be separable from those of Muslims and Jews. But rather, the historical reality on the ground represented a 'Castilian culture', that is, a single, unitary, organic culture in which Jews, Christians and Muslims could participate with various religious and other inflections<sup>90</sup>; no one thread of a unitary culture can be pulled out without the whole thing unraveling. Although the framing of Jews, Christians and Muslims as participants in three separate or one unitary cultures does reflect some scholarly and many popular discussions of life in medieval Spain, the notion of a zero-sum historiography pulls this perspective towards the extreme right, which holds that 'Jews [are] a separate 'race', and one with interests that are inimical to whites'.<sup>91</sup> Antisemitism is hardly the exclusive provenance of the extreme right,<sup>92</sup> but the fear of replacement of Christians by Jews is a prominent feature particular to the new right; this perspective was most prominently on view in the Charlottesville 'Unite the Right' rally in 2017, at which alt-right protestors prominently chanted, 'Jews will not replace us'.<sup>93</sup> Yet in spite (or perhaps because) of this hostile perspective reflected in the text of his work towards his medieval Jewish subjects and the scholars who study them and the ominous allusion to the possibility of his perspective and preferred medieval subjects being supplanted by Jews, Fernández-Morera goes on to revise their history, too.

Because of the religious history of the United States, American popular and scholarly conceptions of religion as a category are, understandably, tend to see the tenets and practices of Protestantism as the model or standard, with other religions' conformity to that standard determining their legitimacy.<sup>94</sup> Brent Nongbri, a historian of early Christianity, notes that 'an especially popular way of viewing religion is a kind of inner disposition and concern for salvation conceived in opposition to politics and other "secular" areas of life... such a view of the world is foreign to ancient cultures'.<sup>95</sup> Crucially, Fernández-Morera adopts exactly this popular view, expecting that medieval Judaism, Christianity and Islam are, first, largely indicated by the inner personal beliefs of their adherents and, second, separable from civic life. In other words, he expects a modern style of personal faith and of separation of church from state in the medieval period and deems the period, well, 'medieval' when he does not find it.<sup>96</sup> Fernández-Morera writes about the 'lack of separation between politics and religion in the Jewish communities of Spain',<sup>97</sup> and that 'the most fundamental fact of life of Muslims in al-Andalus is that no distinction existed between civil and religious law. Put otherwise, throughout the history of Islamic Spain...religion was the law and therefore Islam was the law'<sup>98</sup> as if this were a phenomenon particular to medieval Spanish Jewish and Muslim communities rather than a feature of medieval life as a whole<sup>99</sup>: Religious systems in the Middle Ages did not distinguish between religious, legal and political matters but rather encompassed all of those aspects of life.<sup>100</sup>



In addition to misrepresenting the entire system and category of medieval religion, Fernández-Morera reveals a very paltry understanding of the specific religious communities that made their home in the Iberian Peninsula in the medieval period. A prime, extended example of this comes in the form of Fernández-Morera's discussion of the Karaite Jewish community in medieval Spain. The extent of Karaite presence in Spain is still a major historiographic debate; while the size of such a community is not agreed upon, it is clear that it was never particularly large. Rather than the presence of individuals or communities, Karaites had their major impact in Spain through the circulation of texts and ideas from eastern communities. Fernández-Morera does not see fit to inform his readers that the question is not settled and instead chooses to pretend to know that there was a large and oppressed community of Karaites living in the Iberian Peninsula in the medieval period. As Daniel Lasker notes in an article that Fernández-Morera cites in his work, 'Spanish Karaites have left behind no written records, and we know about their existence almost solely through the Rabbanite writings of the period'.<sup>101</sup> Since the publication of Lasker's article, a very limited number of documents that can be localised to Spain and attributed to a Karaite writer have been discovered. Nevertheless, the paucity of documentary sources strongly suggests that there was never a large, flourishing or permanent Karaite community in Spain. Lasker asserts, again in the same article which is cited in Fernández-Morera's book: 'The lack of extant literary remains from the Spanish Karaite community should in no way lead to an underestimation of its influence on the course of Jewish intellectual history'<sup>102</sup>; in other words, all we can say for certain is that their ideas held great sway. The narrative prose sources written by Rabbanite observers that hint at the possible presence of Karaites in Spain include writings by Rabbanite authorities about how to engage theologically with Karaites, personal correspondence, belletristic texts, most of which Fernández-Morera ignores wholesale.<sup>103</sup> He writes about Karaite Jews and Judaism in Spain not only through gross misrepresentations of the state of the question but, of even greater consequence, by misunderstanding and misrepresenting not only Karaite Judaism but also its relationship with other Judaisms and other Abrahamic faiths. His Karaite coda to chapter six of the work is an example not only of bad history and historiography but also of basic errors of fact.

Karaites are often described as Jews who reject the Oral Torah and rabbinic authority, although a more precise and accurate definition describes their legal-theological movement as 'a Jewish religious movement of a scripturalist and messianic nature'.<sup>104</sup> Yet Fernández-Morera introduces the Karaites to his readers with an interpretation that epitomises the historiographical problems presented by thinking about Jewish history within the framework of a Judaeo-Christian civilisation. He writes that 'the word *Karaite* [is] derived from the Herew *Karaim*, meaning

“Disciple of Scripture”. The precise parsing of the term is still a matter of debate amongst scholars, but to be precise, it is something closer to ‘readers’ than Fernández-Morera suggests. The origins of the phrase that he uses to name the Karaites, ‘disciples of scripture’, are, at their root, Calvinist, taken from Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle must be, that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching, and that it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture.<sup>105</sup>

Using this terminology helps to create the erroneous impression that Karaites are the Calvinists of Judaism, the purveyors of a ‘sola scriptura’ movement devoid of its own schools of legal reasoning. Fernández-Morera himself may not have imported the phrase directly from Calvinism, but rather via some reference to a letter written by the Karaite historian Avraham Firkovitch,<sup>106</sup> although the provenance of the phrase as it is used in *The Myth* is not made explicit. The use of this phrase in Firkovich’s letter reflects not a portrayal of medieval Karaite theology on its own terms, but rather a drive towards political and cultural alliances between Karaites and Protestant Christians unique to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Karaites as part of the emancipation of Jews in central and Eastern Europe.<sup>107</sup> Thus, Fernández-Morera imports an anachronistic and inappropriately Christian perspective; as accidental as this importation may have been, it comports with the overall goal of the work to vindicate Christianity in a historical context, making the book more modern theology and polemic than medieval history.

Furthermore, Fernández-Morera stakes his argument to demographics and identity in a way that almost reads like a right-wing caricature of liberal concerns about the definition and assertion of identity and is suggestive of the fungibility of identity as a philosophical framing that can support arguments at both ends of the political spectrum.<sup>108</sup> He suggests that the paucity of scholarship on Karaites in Spain is because ‘the history of Karaism has been written by the victors, the Orthodox. Practically all scholarly works on Karaism are written by non-Karaites’.<sup>109</sup> There are three major problems with this claim: First, Fernández-Morera incorrectly contrasts Karaite Jews with Orthodox Jews. The majority of Jews, those who are not Karaites, are known as Rabbanite Jews for their extensive tradition of rabbinical legal and theological reasoning. By referring to Rabbanite Jews as the orthodoxy, he is reinforcing the idea of Karaism as a non-normative heresy, the idea that he so deplors in his medieval Rabbanite subjects and his contemporary academic colleagues. Fernández-Morera himself takes issue with the idea of Karaites being considered as heretics in contemporary scholarship: ‘Karaism (called a “sect”, or at best a “heresy”, by its medieval Orthodox [sic]

enemies, who were referred to as “rabbanites” since the tenth century) represented the gravest internal threat to the unity of medieval Spanish Judaism’.<sup>110</sup> However, not only is he himself replicating this episteme, he is also launching a jeremiad against academic problems that have long since been solved and superseded. Although the important early scholarship did treat Karaites as a kind of heretical, non-normative sect within Judaism, that has not been the case for decades and in study after study, we see historians of Karaism reject this older way of thinking. For example, Marina Rustow explains the origins of her research on Egyptian Karaites over the course of writing her recent social history of that community:

The question with which I began my research, then, whether the Qaraïtes were a sect, has led me to the wider problem on which this work focuses: What would the history of the Jewish community look like if viewed without the presumption that Qaraïtes were a sociologically separate group?<sup>111</sup>

By way of a second example, in the section ‘Jewish History Beyond Sect’ of the introduction to his *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding*, Fred Astren writes:

Descriptions of Karaism are often defective because observers maintain simple notions of definition that ultimately become reductionist. When one or two primary elements of Karaism are used to define the whole, then the great variety found in Karaite practice, belief, and historical experience cannot be incorporated into the description.<sup>112</sup>

Both of these scholars, as well as Meira Polliack, whose concise definition of Karaite Judaism I cited earlier, represent examples of the increasing contemporary challenges to their academic discipline and its historical tendency towards treating Karaism as an anomaly or a Jewish heresy. And so, when Fernández-Morera complains that Karaites are overlooked and misrepresented, he can only make that claim by disregarding the most recent twenty-plus years of scholarship on Karaite Judaism that rejects a polemical medieval outlook as its starting point.

Second, by consistently capitalising the O in Orthodox and, as in the citation in the previous paragraph, conflating capital-O Orthodox Jews with Rabbanite Jews, Fernández-Morera is not simply using orthodox as an adjective opposite to heterodox, but is rather referring to a specific denominational movement within modern Judaism. Orthodox Judaism emerged in the nineteenth century as a response to Reform Judaism and other religious consequences of the Enlightenment and the European emancipation of Jews<sup>113</sup>; it is not a medieval phenomenon.<sup>114</sup> In this way, Fernández-Morera is not only implicating his academic colleagues

in an alleged malpractice but also making a large group of contemporary Jews into the scoundrels of medieval history. Furthermore, in order to make this claim of the exclusion of Karaite historians from the contemporary academic discussion, Fernández-Morera must also overlook significant demographic realities: The estimated population of Karaite Jews today worldwide is well under 50,000 individuals, while the estimated population of Rabbanite Jews is over 14 million; a representative sample, then, of Jews who are historians would include far fewer Karaites than Rabbanites.

Finally, the third issue is the identitarian one. Fernández-Morera complains that not enough Karaites are engaged in writing Karaite history, making a point of highlighting that the historians Yitzhak Baer, Nathan Schur, and S.D. Goitein were not Karaites when he cites their work on Karaism. (Oddly, though, Lasker is also not himself a Karaite but is not singled out for such emphasis on his religious identity in the notes.<sup>115</sup>) Where Karaites did and do write Karaite history, Fernández-Morera does not see fit to include them in his book, instead choosing to omit the evidence that would contradict his argument. A particularly notable omission is, aside from the one uncredited borrowing of his turn of phrase, the entire cultural and scholarly oeuvre of Firkovich, who was himself a Karaite leader and cantor who was also a scholar and collector of Karaite manuscripts.<sup>116</sup> Thus, in addition to the erroneous take on the identity of Karaite historians, Fernández-Morera seems to be raising the question of scholars' religious identity simply to score political points as part of the fungible discourse of identity adopted by the extreme right rather than to hear what Karaite scholars and subjects have to say about Karaite history or to engage in a broader discussion about the merits of the diversity of the body of academic historians.

## Conclusions

All in all, *The Myth* seeks to demonise academic cultural history and literary studies in the service of an extreme-right political agenda by badly warping their tools and then declaring victory when those tools do not perform their tasks adequately. Academics who are trained with these tools and methods will recognise the chicanery; the intended audience for a popular history may not. Ultimately, then, Fernández-Morera is taking advantage of his audience of lay readers who are already favourably disposed towards highly critical representations of Islam and Islamic sources in order to present himself as the lone voice of truth in a messy and partisan academic wilderness, knowing that non-academic readers will not necessarily recognise the deceptive techniques he uses to craft that image. He is feeding into existing conservative anger about Islam and about the very possibility of religiously and racially integrated societies in order to make himself a hero and is doing so at the expense

of educating and engaging his readers. A book like this succeeds at promoting its extreme-right political ideology by distorting its sources, obfuscating its methods and counting on readers to be hoodwinked all the while leaving them convinced that they are receiving the real truth.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Matthew Gabriele for comments on an early draft of this chapter and to Monica Green and Stephanie Mulder for comments on a late one. Any infelicities or mistakes are, of course, my own responsibility.
- 2 First published under the *nom de plume* Geoffrey Crayon, *The Alhambra*. London: Henry Colburn, 1832. The revised edition under his own name and with the title *Tales of the Alhambra* was published both in the United States and Great Britain in 1851. On Irving's role in bringing Spain to the English-speaking world, see Rolena Adorno, 'Washington Irving's Romantic Hispanism and its Columbian Legacies', in *Spain in America: The Origins of Hispanism*, ed. Richard L. Kagan. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. 49–104; and Richard L. Kagan, 'Blame It on Washington Irving: New York's Discovery of the Art and Architecture of Spain', in *Nueva York: 1613–1945*, ed. Edward J. Sullivan. New York: New-York Historical Society, 2010. 155–71.
- 3 This chapter will mostly deal with the North American context. For parallels in Great Britain, see chapters 3 and 4 of Mariam Rosser-Owen, *Islamic Arts from Spain*. London: Victoria and Albert Press, 2010.
- 4 Select examples in literature and film include: G. Willow Wilson, *The Bird King*. New York: Grove Press, 2019; Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*. New York: Vintage, 1995. Ridley Scott, dir., *Kingdom of Heaven*, 2005.
- 5 Newt Gingrich opposed the construction of the Cordoba House cultural centre in downtown Manhattan in 2010 by saying, in part: 'The proposed "Cordoba House" ... is a test of the timidity, passivity and historic ignorance of American elites. For example, most of them don't understand that "Cordoba House" is a deliberately insulting term. It refers to Cordoba, Spain – the capital of Muslim conquerors who symbolized their victory over the Christian Spaniards by transforming a church there into the world's third-largest mosque complex'; he statement is posted on Gingrich's web site: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190930005239/https://www.gingrich360.com/2010/07/mosquestatement/>, archived 30 September 2019. Conversely, Barack Obama commented during his visit to Cairo in 2009 that 'Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Cordoba'; the text of Obama's speech is available via the *New York Times*. Archived 1 September 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190901182258/https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04/us/politics/04obama.text.html>.
- 6 Darío Fernández-Morera. *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*. Wilmington: ISI Books, 2016.
- 7 In general, I will use the terms *medieval Spain*, *Iberia* and *al-Andalus* interchangeably to refer to the lands of the Iberian Peninsula; each toponym has merits and drawbacks, both historically related to contemporary usage. Fernández-Morera insists that Spain is the only historically accurate term to use because Arab historians used it alongside al-Andalus and because it had been a Roman territory named Hispania, so it is most appropriate to use the name that is based on a term coming from a Romance language (48–51). However, to write about Spain in the Middle Ages is a delicate and

often-anachronistic proposition that requires definition, explanation and ultimately walking a fine terminological line. While Spain naturally did not exist as the kind of political entity that we know today, the name *España* derives from a Roman understanding of the geography of its westernmost province, *Hispania*, which it occupied beginning in the third century before the common era; in his Latin-language *History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi*, the Visigothic bishop Isidore of Seville (d. 636) uses *Hispania* when he praises the verdancy of the land of the old Roman province, by then ruled by the Goths. It is not until the second half of the thirteenth century that we see the toponym *España* utilised in Romance-language prose texts, when it first occurred in the Castilian king Alfonso X's *Estoria de Espanna* referring to his kingdom of Castile as well as to (but distinct from) the Andalusi principalities that pledged loyalty to him. The term was, in fact, initially a borrowing from the Occitan, used by French pilgrims to describe the inhabitants of the land south of the Pyrenees whom they encountered on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela; and so the close connection of the land of Spain to the toponyms *España* and Spain that Fernández-Morera asserts is less close than he would like to believe. And while this panorama drawn from the most canonical texts from Spain would seem to suggest that the term *España* and its variants is the name of an entity that emerges along with the earliest Castilian desires for a political and linguistic hegemony, the rupture is not nearly so complete, neither along the linguistic nor the temporal axis. Numismatic evidence shows a complete conflation of the geography and idea of a greater Hispania with the geography and idea of an Arabophone, Islamicate al-Andalus in the early years of the Umayyad emirate in the eighth and ninth centuries; when Arabising Hebrew poets sought to laud their land in a meter that would require a word with two long syllables and a short one rather than two short ones and a long, they lauded *Espamya* (*es-pam-ya*, long-long-short) instead of and as equally as *Sefarad* (*se-fa-rad*, short, short, long). Narratives of continuity and rupture both have their partisans in the modern world and both have implications for the terminology used to describe the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages; but all told, the notion that there was no *Spain* in the Middle Ages is as oversimplifying and equivocating as the notion that Spain has always been what it is today, even in the Middle Ages. (The bulk of this note is drawn from the section 'A National Spain and a Jewish Spain' in S.J. Pearce, "His (Jewish) Nation...and His (Muslim) King": Modern Nationalism Articulated Through Medieval Andalusi Poetry', in *His Pen and Ink Are a Powerful Mirror*, eds. Adam Bursi, S.J. Pearce, and Hamza Zafer. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2020; a longer discussion of the toponymy may be found there. The long and the short of it, though, is that the name of the place has always shifted and has never been wholly religiously, linguistically or imperially contingent.)

- 8 For an overview of Reconquest historiography, particularly as it had its origins in Spain, see Alejandro García-Sanjuan, 'Rejecting al-Andalus, Exalting the Reconquista: Historical Memory in Contemporary Spain', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 10:1 (2018): 127–45.
- 9 *The Spanish Constitution of 1978*, Article 16.3 reads: 'There shall be no State religion. The public authorities shall take the religious beliefs of Spanish society into account and shall consequently maintain appropriate co-operation with the Catholic Church and the other confessions'. The official English translation of the constitution, from which this citation is drawn, is found in the digital archives of the *Boletín Oficial del Estado*. Archived 27 July 2019 <https://web.archive.org/web/20190727140256/https://www.boe.es/legislacion/documentos/ConstitucionINGLES.pdf>.

- 10 Ryan Szpiech has traced the development of the term in his 'The Convivencia Wars: Decoding Historiography's Polemic with Philology', in *The Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, eds. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Karla Mallette. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 135–61; the historiography outlined in this paragraph largely follows Szpiech's article.
- 11 Julian Ribera y Tarragó. *Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia Española*. Madrid: Imprenta Ibérica, 1912. 54.
- 12 The Almoravids were a Sanhaja Berber dynasty based in Marrakech that also adhered to the Mālikī legal school and that arrived in the Iberian Peninsula at the invitation of al-Mu'tamid, the emir of Seville to join him in his fight against Alfonso VI of Castile; the Almohad and Andalusi factions subsequently split and engaged in infighting, challenging the idea that this period was marked exclusively by *jihād* waged by Muslims against Christians.
- 13 Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *El Cid en la historia*. Madrid: Jiménez Molina, 1921. 30–1.
- 14 Menéndez Pidal, *Orígenes del español*. Madrid: Calpe, 1926. 526.
- 15 Américo Castro. *España en su historia*. Buenos Aires: Losada, 1948. The volume was translated, revised and updated as *The Structure of Spanish History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954; both versions of the work have been regularly reissued and reprinted and are widely available.
- 16 Denise K. Filios, 'Expulsion from Paradise: Exiled Intellectuals and Andalusian Tolerance', in *In the Light of Medieval Spain: Islam, the West, and the Relevance of the Past*, eds. Simon Doubleday and David Coleman. Routledge: New York, 2008. 91–114; Eduardo Subirats, ed. *Americo Castro y la revision de la memoria*. Barcelona: Libertarias Prodhufi, 2003.
- 17 For a variety of panoramic surveys of *convivencia* and its place in the academic study of medieval Spain, see Anna Akasoy, 'Convivencia and its Discontents', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42:3 (2010): 489–99; Maya Soifer Irish, 'Beyond Convivencia: Critical Reflections on the Historiography of Interfaith Relations in Christian Spain', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 1:1 (2009): 19–35; and Kenneth Baxter Wolf, 'Convivencia in Medieval Spain: A Brief History of an Idea', *Religion Compass* 3:1 (2009): 72–85.
- 18 Georgina Dopic, 'Tolerance? Blood Purity and Inquisition in Early Modern Spain', MARC Distinguished Lecture, New York University, 3/1/16; Stuart Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- 19 Brian Catlos has proposed substituting the term *conveniencia* for *convivencia* to highlight this arrangement as one of pragmatic convenience rather than idealised coexistence. Brian Catlos. *Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain*. New York: Basic Books, 2018. 428–9.
- 20 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 2.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 22 Fernández-Morera's academic work is on later Spanish literature and does not focus on the Arabic or Islamic contexts that still remained during the early modern period. This is not to say that scholars should never evolve or cross field or disciplinary boundaries; on the contrary, a place like medieval Spain can only be studied with extensive interdisciplinary work. However, for a first foray into a new field to be an attempt to tear it down to its studs raises some suspicion about that scholar's interests and investments in the field of study.
- 23 A conciliatory reading might find that Fernández-Morera's book does not fall as far to the right on the political spectrum as to be properly called

Alt-Right; however, it certainly does reflect the themes and concerns of the otherwise extreme new right (or 'alt-light'), which supports slightly less extreme and even more diffuse versions of the principles supported by the Alt-Right. For more on the gradations of right-wing thought to have emerged since the rise of the Tea Party movement in American politics since 2010, see Thomas Main. *The Rise of the Alt-Right*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2018; George Hawley. *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019; and Jens Rydgren, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the Extreme Right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

- 24 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 4–5. Emphasis mine.
- 25 Conservative publications and pundits maintain that liberal bias amongst university faculty has negative impacts on the breadth and fairness of university education. However, recent research is suggestive that conservative politicians are more concerned about liberal bias in universities than conservative students' experiences suggest is warranted; other research has shown that political views do not seem to have an impact. Both sets of studies have been reported on in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: Steven Johnson, 'Is Political Bias in Grading a Myth?', *Chronicle of Higher Education* 13 February 2019, [www.chronicle.com/article/Is-Political-Bias-in-Grading-a/245694](http://www.chronicle.com/article/Is-Political-Bias-in-Grading-a/245694), accessed September 2019; even the more traditional conservative-leaning (as opposed to new right) publication *The National Review* presents this research as challenging the standard conservative narrative about liberal bias in university faculty, as in Musa al-Gharbi, 'Ideological Discrimination in Academia Is More Complicated Than You Think', *The National Review*, 9 September 2019. Archived 10 September 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190910032556/https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/09/ideological-discrimination-colleges-universities-complicated/>.
- 26 Darío Fernández-Morera. *American Academia and the Survival of Marxist Ideas*. Westport: Praeger, 1996. The volume is sarcastically dedicated 'to my fellow professors, without whom this book would not have been possible'.
- 27 'En las coyunturas más decisivas de su historia concentró la hispanidad sus energías espirituales para crear una cultura universal. Esta ha de ser también, la ambición más noble de la España del actual momento que, frente a la pobreza y paralización pasadas, siente la voluntad de renovar su gloriosa tradición científica. Tal empeño ha de cimentarse, ante todo, en la restauración de la clásica y cristiana unidad de las ciencias destruída en el siglo XVIII... Hay de crear un contrapeso frente al especialismo exagerado y solitario de nuestra época volviendo a las ciencias su régimen de sociabilidad, el cual supone un franco seguro retorno a los imperativos de coordinación y jerarquía. Hay que imponer, en suma, al orden de la cultura, las ideas esenciales que han inspirado nuestro Glorioso Movimiento, en las que se conjugan las lecciones más puras de la tradición universal y católica con las exigencias de la modernidad'. *Boletín oficial del Estado*, 28 noviembre 1939, 6668–71. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190114100528/https://www.boe.es/datos/pdfs/BOE/1939/332/A06668-06671.pdf>. Archived 14 January 2019, translation mine.
- 28 For more on this subject see Julio Escalona Monge, Cristina Jular Pérez-Alfaro, and María Isabel Alfonso Antón, 'El medievalismo, lo medieval y el CSIC en el primer franquismo', in *El franquismo y la apropiación del pasado*, ed. Francisco José Moreno Martín. Madrid: Editorial Pablo Iglesias, 2017. 159–88.
- 29 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 237.



- 30 Jens Rydgren, 'The Radical Right: An Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 2.
- 31 See Janina Safran. *Defining Boundaries in al-Andalus: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Islamic Iberia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013; and Jessica Coope. *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.
- 32 For an argument the new extreme right is not fascism per se but has 'affinities to fascism', see Nigel Copsey, 'The Radical Right and Fascism', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 105–20. David Neiwert draws a closer connection between fascism and the extreme right in the afterword to his *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump*. New York: Verso Books, 2017. The new extreme right in Spain also tiptoes towards the country's own fascist past, as in Vox party leader Santiago Abascal's now-notorious 'Living Spain' speech at Vistalegre ahead of the 2018 elections in that country. That speech, laden with references to Spain's glorious medieval, Catholic past that defended Europe against Islam, is full of insinuations that Abascal tacitly accepts critics' attempts to label him as a fascist, all the while explicitly rejecting that connection; the speech may be viewed online: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_ClfZ5amIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_ClfZ5amIE), accessed September 2019.
- 33 'About ISI', <https://home.isi.org/about/about-isi>, accessed January 2019. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Fernández-Morera holds that university presses will not publish the kind of work that his volume represents because of fear and ideological weakness: 'University presses do not want to get in trouble presenting an Islamic domination of even centuries ago as anything but a positive event, and academic specialists would rather not portray negatively a subject that constitutes their bread and butter' (8). In fact, a university press associated with a major Catholic university in the United States declined to publish the book before Fernández-Morera submitted it to ISI; however, the choice was not made out of fear and certainly not out of a desire to lessen the importance of Catholics in history or of Catholic history, but rather because of the many historical and historiographical flaws that are foundational to the work (pers. com. with one of the blind reviewers for the press, June 2018).
- 34 'About ISI', <https://home.isi.org/about/about-isi>, accessed January 2019.
- 35 Recently, various medieval historians have written on this topic for a general audience in the wake of conservative American politicians invoking the idea of western civilisation in racially charged ways: Matthew Gabriele and David Perry, 'Steve King Says He Was Just Defending "Western Civilization"', *Washington Post*, 15 January 2019. Archived 7 February 2019. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190207193036/https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/01/15/steve-king-says-he-was-just-defending-western-civilization-thats-racist-too/?utm\\_term=.3232f33d6aa5](https://web.archive.org/web/20190207193036/https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/01/15/steve-king-says-he-was-just-defending-western-civilization-thats-racist-too/?utm_term=.3232f33d6aa5); and Sarah Bond, 'What Rep. Steve King Gets Wrong about the Dark Ages and Western Civilization', *Forbes Online*, June 2016, [www.forbes.com/sites/drsarahbond/2016/07/23/stevekingandthedarkages/#6a69a3175980](http://www.forbes.com/sites/drsarahbond/2016/07/23/stevekingandthedarkages/#6a69a3175980), accessed February 2019. Academic writing on the subject includes: chapters six and eight of Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006; Eugene Weber, 'Western Civilization', in *Imagined Histories*, eds. Anthony Molho and Gordon Wood. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. 206–21; Thomas Patterson, *Inventing Western Civilization*. New York: New York

- University Press, 1997; and Silvia Federici, *Enduring Western Civilization*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1995.
- 36 Douglas Hartmann, et al., 'One (Multicultural) Nation under God: Changes Uses and Meanings of the Term 'Judeo-Christian' in the American Media', *Journal of Media and Religion* 4:4 (2005): 207–34; K. Healan Gaston, 'Interpreting Judeo-Christianity in America', *Religere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 2:2 (2012): 291–304. See also especially the respective chapters by Marianne Mayonet, Michael Fagenblat, Warren Zev Harvey, Izhak Benyamini, Amanda Kluvel, and Anya Topolsky in *Is There a Judeo-Christian Tradition?: A European Perspective*, ed. Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski. Boston: DeGreuter, 2016. Jewish cultural critics have been pushing back against the idea of a Judeo-Christian culture as early as the 1960s, as in Arthur Cohen, 'The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition', *Commentary Magazine*, November 1969. Archived 12 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190812045347/https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-myth-of-the-judeo-christian-tradition/>.
- 37 When I use the term white supremacist here, I am not strictly referring to members of the Klan and their ilk; rather, the academic definition of white supremacy, informed by the field of critical race theory, as articulated by the legal scholar Frances Lee Ansley ('Race, Class, and the Future of Civil Rights Scholarship', *Cornell Law Review* 74 (1989): 933), is: 'a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings'. Note, too, that this definition is thirty years old and that this is not, as some claim, a trendy and of-the-moment recalibration of the term.
- 38 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 240.
- 39 Aristotle Kallis, 'The Radical Right and Islamophobia', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 42–60.
- 40 David Nirenberg, 'Sibling Rivalries, Scriptural Communities: What Medieval History Can and Cannot Teach Us About Relations Between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam', in *Faithful Narratives: Historians, Religion, and the Challenge of Objectivity*, eds. Andrea Sterk and Nina Caputo. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014. 68.
- 41 Kim Phillips-Fein, 'How the Right Learned to Loathe Higher Education', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 2019. [www.chronicle.com/article/How-the-Right-Learned-to/245580](http://www.chronicle.com/article/How-the-Right-Learned-to/245580), accessed March 2019.
- 42 María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 2002.
- 43 Kenneth Baxter Wolf went so far as to have delivered an entire keynote talk at the Southeastern Medieval Association in 2007 (posted by the author: [www.academia.edu/21470056/Convivencia\\_and\\_the\\_Ornament\\_of\\_the\\_World\\_](http://www.academia.edu/21470056/Convivencia_and_the_Ornament_of_the_World_), accessed September 2019) devoted to taking apart the title of the book *The Ornament of the World*, when, in fact, that was not a title of Menocal's choosing. It is worth mentioning that the body of the talk is a critique of the book's title 'as a kind of synecdoche standing for the work as a whole'. This is not necessarily the most forthright way to critique a book; in addition to quite literally enacting the cautioned-against behaviour of the maxim about judging a book by its cover, anyone who

has published a book, scholarly or popular, knows that publishing houses retain final control over the title. In fact, in this case Little, Brown replaced Menocal's working title, *A History of a First-Rate Place*, with *The Ornament of the World*. So separate is the title from the body of the work that when the book was translated into a variety of languages, the title changed widely to reflect different aspects of the book; and so while the Spanish title of the book is rendered literally as *La joya del mundo*, in Italian it is entitled *Principi, poeti, e vizir*; in German *Die Palme im Westen*; and in French, simply, *L'andalousie arabe*, which is the same form of the Arabic-language title, *Al-Andalus al-'Arab* (A full list of translations of *Ornament* may be found at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190116185439/http://mariarosamenocal.com/the-ornament-of-the-world.html>, archived 16 January 2019.) And so, to critique Menocal's book on the basis of a title without any indication of her role in choosing or approving it is to not engage with her work; instead, it suggests a desire to hatchet the book for other reasons, on any pretext.

44 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 9.

45 As Maribel Fierro comments in her review of *The Myth* (*Al-Qantara* 39:1 (2018): 239–53) that

the book's objective is not — as is usually the case — to answer a series of questions based on a reading of the source material. This book is the reaction of the author (hereinafter FM) to various studies written mostly by contemporary scholars, where FM sees an approach to the historical experience of al-Andalus that he considers to be not only incorrect, but even blameworthy, and goes so far as to suggest that such criticism applies to the near totality of studies in circulation.

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46 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 3. He in fact describes the book's 'interpretive stance' as 'a Machiavellian one'. Yet absent a definition of what Fernández-Morera, who claims to be opposed to jargon, means by this, it leaves the reader wondering what, exactly, his approach is. Machiavelli is a figure with enough different reception histories and enough different after-lives that this claim to Machiavellian interpretation allows a broad swath of readers to identify with Fernández-Morera's approach. The only clue he gives comes in the epilogue:

'A Machiavellian analysis can apply to the Muslim invasion of Hispania Edward Said's shrewd observation: "thinking about cultural exchange involves thinking about domination and forcible appropriation: someone loses, someone gains". The book has therefore argued that in cultural terms alone, the invasion, conquest, and colonization of Christian Spain during the first half of the eighth century by Islamic warriors was a disaster for the Christian population because a nascent, post-Roman, Christian civilization was nipped in the bud. The pre-Islamic Hispano-Roman-Visigoth population was in no need of being "civilized" by a hegemonic Islamic empire

(236); it is still not clear what role Machiavelli plays here. By way of comparison, when Anouar Majid invokes Machiavelli as part of the framing of the first chapter of his *We Are All Moors: Ending Centuries of Crusades against Muslims and Other Minorities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, he specifies that he is drawing on the political theorist's description of Fernando of Aragon's treatment of his Muslim vassals as a lens through which to interpret later Castilian kings' treatment of Muslim and crypto-Muslim populations (9–10, 31–58).

- 47 I was invited to contribute this chapter to the present volume on the basis of a short blog post review that I wrote of *The Myth* in March 2017. Archived 31 March 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190331103504/https://wp.nyu.edu/sjpearce/2017/03/17/paradise-lost/>; because I had, in effect, previewed some of my arguments online, I had the opportunity to observe the ways in which lay readers who debate this kind of theme on the internet respond to a critique of the rhetorical strategies and methodological flaws of the volume. They insist that discussions of methodology are irrelevant and only want to know about errors of fact, understand history to be a simple enumeration of events and dates rather than a narrative of change over time and see no need to engage with competing analyses of facts or alternative narratives. A few examples will suffice: A reader using the name P.J. Norelius commented:

A rather dishonest review. The author is unable to point out any really aggravating mistakes in Fernández-Morera's book, so she resorts to faulting him for minor slips and technicalities... More seriously, she accuses him of 'linguistic ignorance' and depicts him as relying solely on translations of primary sources.

I also shared the review on Goodreads ([www.goodreads.com/review/show/1945842993](http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1945842993)), where a user with the screen name Rytis commented: 'The lengthiest piece of fallacious gibberish I've ever read! I was expecting to see some historical refutation, but all I found was constant complaints about authors use of translated sources and arguing over semantics. Dishonest review'. Goodreads user with the screen name Josef Duben defends Fernández-Morera's belief that history can be written without engaging with the field: 'The book references to primary historical sources — it is more clear approach than referencing to the secondary sources — if you write about fall of Rome, you do not have to reference to E. Gibbon'. The role of internet comment forums in the development and dissemination of extreme-right thought and rhetoric and attempts to diminish and circumvent the value of expertise and scientific investigation is by now well established. For more general writing on this phenomenon, see 'The Alt-Right and the Internet' in Hawley, *The Alt-Right*, 106–28.

- 48 For the origins of this figure of speech, see the Gospel according to Luke, Chapter 4.
- 49 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 66–7.
- 50 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 268–9 n.43 and n.44. A few glosses on these notes are in order: First, the presence and provenance of the horseshoe arch in Andalusian architecture is so well known as to verge on historiographical cliché; the idea that Islamic art historians ignore this is absurd; more on this in the following paragraphs. Second, it is not clear what Fernández-Morera means when he says that 'no Catholic churches were left in southern Spain after the Muslim tide retreated'. Church buildings with horseshoe arches are still standing, other churches from that period are still standing and we have legal and historical sources from various points of inflection and conquest in the Middle Ages that protect church buildings in newly-Islamised cities. Even the more indigenously Spanish practices of Christianity have remained in pockets in spite of the historical encroachment of Rome and to this day it is possible to attend a daily Mozarab-rite Mass in the cathedral church of Toledo, as it has been since the early thirteenth-century intervention of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada in favour of the rite against the Roman rite that had gained popularity and ecclesiastical authority in Spain.

in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: [www.catedralprimada.es/es/info/rito-hispano-mozarabe/horario-de-culto/](http://www.catedralprimada.es/es/info/rito-hispano-mozarabe/horario-de-culto/), accessed September 2019. The final non-sequitur in these two notes is fascinating. He is implying that architectural elements themselves are inherently confessional: that arches are either Christian or Muslim. Art historical analysis does not tend to view architecture in this way. For a brief overview on ways of writing about the relationship between art, architecture and religion, see the discussion in Nasser Rabbat's review of the reinstalled Islamic art galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. 'The New Islamic Art Galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art', *Artforum* 50:5 (2012). Archived 30 March 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190330214547/http://www.catedralprimada.es/es/info/rito-hispano-mozarabe/horario-de-culto/>.

- 51 Perry Atkinson, 'Focus Today: Interview with Darío Fernández-Morera', March 2016, <https://youtu.be/REljGDVQJDs>, accessed September 2019; the cited comments are found from minutes 7:10–7:15. In terms of situating the rhetoric of this complaint in the current landscape of political communication, one cannot help but hear echoes of Donald Trump's regular observations about what people don't know when in fact he is referring to common knowledge that he himself might have only learned recently; for examples see Melissa Chan, '5 Things President Trump Says America Doesn't Know', *Time Magazine*, 24 March 2017 <https://web.archive.org/web/20190309013203/http://time.com/4711495/donald-trump-america-doesnt-know/>, accessed 9 March 2019. On the ideological and rhetorical relationships between Donald Trump and the extreme right, see 'The Alt-Right and Donald Trump', in Hawley, *The Alt-Right*, 172–84; while Hawley does not consider Trump to be part of the alt-right himself, he notes that the new extreme right is 'energized by Donald Trump' (179).
- 52 Abigail Krasner Balbale, Jerilynn D. Dodds, and María Rosa Menocal. *The Arts of Intimacy: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Creation of Castilian Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008 (82–3); the book is still in print and was reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* and other widely read publications, so there can be no question about its availability to the public.
- 53 For a more general discussion of this kind of rhetoric, see Bruce McComiskey. *Post-Truth Rhetoric and Composition*. Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2017.
- 54 Fernández Morera, *The Myth*, 177.
- 55 For an example of this bowdlerisation, we may consider the second epigram in the chapter:

The years between 900 and 1200 in Spain and North Africa are known as the Hebrew 'golden age', a sort of Jewish Renaissance that arose from the fusion of the Arab and Jewish intellectual worlds. Jews watched their Arab counterparts closely and learned to be astronomers, philosophers, scientists, and poets. At its peak about one thousand years ago, the Muslim world made a remarkable contribution to science, notably mathematics and medicine. Baghdad in its heyday and southern Spain built universities to which thousands flocked. Rulers surrounded themselves with scientists and artists. A spirit of freedom allowed Jews, Christians, and Muslims to work side by side

(*The Myth*, 179)

Fernández Morera attributes this quotation to an article by Francis Ghiles in a 1983 article in the journal *Nature* entitled 'What is Wrong with

Muslim Science?'; however, his citation is only partially accurate. Ghiles' article is in fact a review of a book review of Ziauddin Sardar's 1982 monograph *Science and Technology in the Middle East*, a volume that is in fact critical of overly rosy presentations of science in the Islamic Middle East. The *Nature* review of that book actually opens with the portion of the text cited by Fernández-Morera beginning with 'at its peak' and continuing through the end of the citation. The first two sentences appear nowhere in Ghiles' review; instead they come from the FAQ section of a web site called *Jews for Allah*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181216031014/http://www.jews-for-allah.org/>, archived 16 December 2019, which appears to be aimed primarily at encouraging Jews to convert to Islam. The web site's tagline is the somewhat theologically garbled 'Accepting the Messiah Jesus without the Christian theology', which does not reflect mainstream Islamic understandings that Jesus was a prophet but not, as he is held to be by Christians, the messiah. Its subsection 'Jews not for Judaism' is headed: 'You are not alone. Thousands of Jews are leaving Judaism'. Across the board, the site consistently conflates Jews and Israelis and makes approving reference to the debunked anti-Semitic tract, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The editors of the site have also mounted a fundraising campaign to create a translation of the Qur'ān into Hebrew for explicitly proselytic purposes. In response to a query about the role of minorities in Islamicate civilisations, the FAQ section introduces Ghiles' review with those two sentences as an editorial response to the question and then quotes the opening sentences of Ghiles' review to support that response, archived 8 February 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170208031229/http://jews-for-allah.org/history-of-love/jewish-golden-age.htm>. In other words, the text as cited in Fernández-Morera's epigram is cited from Jews for Allah rather than directly from the review; the author erroneously combines the web introduction with the citation from the book review.

- 56 Rebecca Winer, 'Judaism: Sephardim', *The Jewish Virtual Library*, archived 24 March 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190324111918/https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/sephardim>.
- 57 Winer, 'Sephardim', apud Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 177.
- 58 On Arianism, see Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; and Richard Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversies*, 318–81. New York: Baker Academic, 1988.
- 59 Winer, 'Sephardim'.
- 60 Benjamin Netanyahu, as of this writing still the prime minister of Israel, is an interesting figure in this context. His father, Benzion Netanyahu, was a prominent if controversial historian of the Spanish Inquisition. Netanyahu père's magnum opus, *The Origins of the Inquisition in 15th-Century Spain*. New York: Random House, 1995, argues that does not only argue that blood purity drove the Inquisition, but that such an interest on the part of non-Jewish civic officials began much earlier than previously believed. Netanyahu's approach to Jewish history is not universally accepted within the academy where it is seen more as a morality play about the dangers of Jewish assimilation written in the wake of and as an attempt at explaining the full impact of the Holocaust. Despite the tepid reception of the work in academic historical circles, it has been suggested that clear through-lines exist between the father's historiography and the son's politics, particularly with respect to an overriding pessimistic outlook on the place of Jews in history. Notably, Netanyahu *fil*s gave a copy of his father's *The Origins* to Pope Francis when he visited the Vatican in 2013.

- 61 See 'About AICE', <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115103828/https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/about-aice>, archived 15 January 2019.
- 62 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 11.
- 63 Jim Romenesko, 'PEJ Study Challenges Fox's 'We Report, You Decide' Slogan', *The Washington Post*, 14 March 2005, [www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2005/pej-study-challenges-foxs-we-report-you-decide-slogan/](http://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2005/pej-study-challenges-foxs-we-report-you-decide-slogan/), accessed September 2019.
- 64 Brian Steinberg, 'Fox News Unveils New Slogan', *Variety*, 26 September 2018, 24 May 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190524064156/https://variety.com/2018/digital/news/fox-news-unveils-fox-nation-slogan-opinion-done-right-1202958247/>.
- 65 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 11.
- 66 For an overview of *jihād*, see Michael Bonner. *Jihād in Islamic History: Doctrine and Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. Fernández-Morera dismisses this work in a single sentence in a footnote: 'Bonner waffles in his treatment of jihad and tries to show its nice side' (253, note 40). In other words, Fernández-Morera objects to Bonner's presentation of a complete panorama of *jihād* practices rather than focusing only on its manifestation in the context of holy war; what Fernández-Morera describes as 'waffling' is in fact Bonner offering the full picture of the practices comprised by the term *jihād* to his readers. It is not possible for Fernández-Morera to sustain the two claims at once: that the Islamic world is a perpetually war-torn dystopia and that nobody besides him writes completely about religious life in the Islamic world.
- 67 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 22.
- 68 Readers are advised to consult studies on *jihād* in al-Andalus that do, in fact, engage with the relevant texts, including Javier Albarrán, 'La frontera en disputa: El yihad como discurso centralizador y el espacio fronterizo en al-Andalus', *Intus-Legere Historia* 12:2 (2018): 58–92; Abigail Krasner Balbale, 'Jihād As Political Legitimation' in *The Articulation of Power in Medieval Iberia and the Maghrib*, ed. Amira Bennison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 89–91. Alejandro García-Sanjuan, 'Bases doctrinales y jurídicas del yihad en el derecho islámico clásico (siglos VIII-XIII)', *Clío & Crimen* 6 (2009): 243–77; and Cristina de la Puente, 'El Yihād en el Califato Omeya de al-Andalus y su culminación bajo Hišām II', in *La Península Ibérica y el Mediterráneo en los siglos XI y XII*, ed. Fernando Valdés. Aguilar de Campo: Fundación Santa María la Real, 1999. 23–38.
- 69 Fierro, 'Review of *The Myth*', 251.
- 70 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 4.
- 71 Ibid., 13. Conversely, Fernández-Morera suggests that what he sees as unfavourable treatment of Visigoths might be due to the fact that scholars of medieval Spain do not read French or Spanish:

One factor may be that scholars are simply unaware of the reality. Consider that the best monographic studies of Hispano-Roman-Visigoth art and culture are available only in Spanish and French. Those Islamic studies scholars who write on Islamic Spain may not understand how the achievements they scribe to Islam in Spain actually reflect Islam's assimilation of elements of other cultures.

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While it is true that Anglophone scholars can always do more to keep abreast of and cite the scholarship produced by our Spanish colleagues especially, the notion that scholars of medieval Spain whose disciplinary

- background is in Islamic Studies don't read French or Spanish scholarship is risible. What is interesting to note in the contrast between these two comments on the need to read works in their original language and have access to texts that have not yet been translated is that Fernández-Morera considers modern French and Spanish to be necessary while all of the medieval languages are rendered superfluous again demonstrating that this is really a book about modern ways of thinking about the Middle Ages and not an attempt to get at the medieval period itself. It is also perhaps telling that Fernández-Morera, doing so much of his analysis in translation, runs to the assumption that the reason people might be wrong is because they don't read enough or the right languages. On this phenomenon, see David Gramling, *The Invention of Monlingualism*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- 72 For the classic scholarly treatment of the role of genre and literariness in the creation of historical texts, see Gabrielle Spiegel, 'History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 65:1 (1990): 59–86.
  - 73 Reference works such as *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources*, ed. Joel Rosenthal. New York: Routledge, 2011 are designed to help students orient themselves in the conventions of different documentary and literary genres; in general, this is a set of analytic skills that people learn when they come to the broad field of medieval studies and similar handbooks exist for a variety of medieval subfields.
  - 74 For basic biographical details see Judith Tarragona, 'Samuel ibn Naghrella', *Encyclopedia of Jews in Islamic Lands*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. Accessed through Brill Reference Works Online, September 2019.
  - 75 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 182.
  - 76 This discussion of the sources for Ibn Naghrīla's life follows the work of Ross Brann in *Power in the Portrayal*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
  - 77 *Divan Shemuel Hanagid*, ed. Dov Jarden. New York: Hebrew Union College Press, 1966. Interested readers who do not read Hebrew may consult Peter Cole's translations of Ibn Naghrīla's poems in his volume *The Dream of the Poem*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
  - 78 In his recent history of the laws governing Muslims living under non-Muslim rule, Alan Verskin distinguishes between legal manuals or law codes and specific juridical rulings in response to a particular case or question. And although he is writing about Islamic law here, Verskin's distinction holds for Jewish law as well. And in his legal history of urbanisation during the Almoravid period, Camilo Gómez-Rivas writes at some length about the ways in which legal thinking evolved over time and interacted with social realities. See Alan Verskin. *Oppressed in the Land?: Fatwās on Muslims Living under Non-Muslim Rule from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. 3–8; and Camilo Gómez-Rivas. *Law and the Islamization of Morocco under the Almoravids*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. 33–8. It is also worth noting that Fernández-Morera completely omits from his bibliography Verskin's study specifically of Islamic law in relationship to territorial conquest in the Iberian Peninsula in any of his discussions of legal sources: *Islamic Law and the Crisis of the Reconquista: The Debate on the Status of Muslim Communities in Christendom*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. For recent theoretical thinking about Jewish law in society, see Rachel Rafael Neis, 'The Seduction of Law: Rethinking Legal Studies in Jewish Studies', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109:1 (2019): 119–38. Fernández-Morera's specific example deals with laws against interfaith marriage; for a study of the realities on the ground as reflected in



the kinds of sources historians can use for social history, see David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, especially chapters 2–3 and 5.

79 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 11.

80 The effective manifesto (or, perhaps better-put, the anti-manifesto) and definitive history of The New Criticism is Cleanth Brooks' essay, 'The New Criticism', *The Sewanee Review* 87:4 (1979): 592–607. Among the foundational works of new-critical theory include Brooks' *The Well-Wrought Urn*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1947; and Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'The Intentional Fallacy', *The Sewanee Review* 54:3 (1946): 468–88.

81 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 10.

82 Similarly, in his epilogue, he explains that 'this book has... 'problematicized', 'unveiled', and 'uncovered' al-Andalus' (235). This kind of framing suggests that he is not interested in developing or using a robust methodology that suits his perspective on how literary and historical criticism should be done, but instead prefers to twist and poke fun at a methodology that he disdains.

83 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 9–10.

84 Jonathan Z. Smith. 'Religion, Religions, Religious', in *Relating Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. 179–96.

85 Guy Stroumsa. 'The Scholarly Discovery of Religion in Early Modern Times', in *The Construction of a Global World: Patterns of Change*, eds. Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 313.

86 For example, see the recent essay Jonathan Decter, drawing upon his current research: 'Things Jewish: The View from Judeo-Arabic', *Marginalia Review of Books*, 5 June 2019, 24 May 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190524113049/https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/things-jewish-view-judeo-arabic/>.

87 Emmet Scott appears to be a pseudonym for an individual who has made career writing books that attempt, unsuccessfully, to debunk various and diverse fields of study; it is unclear what his intellectual background is to prepare him for such a task.

88 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 9.

89 Among the studies of Christian communities in Islamic Spain that Fernández-Morera appears to have overlooked in his assessment of the state of the field include Ann Chrystis, *Christians in al-Andalus, 700–1100*. New York: Routledge, 2002; Jessica Coope. *The Martyrs of Cordoba: Community and Family Conflict in an Age of Mass Conversion*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995; Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014 reprint. Other studies have examined the impact of multiconfessional contact specifically upon Christian populations all of which are absent from Fernández-Morera's bibliography including Remie Constable, *To Live Like a Moor*; and Vivian B. Mann, *Uneasy Communion: Jews, Christians, and the Altarpieces of Medieval Spain*; and Charles Tiezen, *Christian Identity Amid Islam in Medieval Spain*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

90 Balbale, Dodds, and Menocal. *The Arts of Intimacy*.

91 Hawley, *The Alt-Right*, 13.

92 An overview of extreme, new-right antisemitism may be found in Ruth Wodak, 'The Radical Right and Antisemitism', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 61–84; and in the second section of Deborah Lipstadt, *Antisemitism*

- Here and Now*. New York: Schocken Books, 2019. 29–80. For a broad history of anti-Judaism and its relationship to antisemitisms old and new, see David Nirenberg. *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2013.
- 93 News coverage of the event focusing on this chant and the alt-right ‘replacement theory’ includes Emma Green, ‘Why the Charlottesville Marchers Were Obsessed with Jews’, *The Atlantic*, 15 August 2017. Archived 23 September 2019. [www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/nazis-racism-charlottesville/536928/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/nazis-racism-charlottesville/536928/); and Yair Rosenberg, ‘Jews Will Not Replace Us: Why White Supremacists Go after Jews’, *The Washington Post*, 14 August 2017. Archived 22 July 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190722091930/https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/14/jews-will-not-replace-us-why-white-supremacists-go-after-jews/>. Ideological contextualisation of this phrase is provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190902095155/https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/10/10/when-white-nationalists-chant-their-weird-slogans-what-do-they-mean>, archived 2 September 2019. A historical overview of replacement theory and its relationship to the alt-right’s ideological fear of a so-called ‘white genocide’ in which Jews are amongst the populations that stand to replace white people, see Kevin Feshami, ‘Fear of White Genocide: Tracing the History of a Myth from Germany to Charlottesville’, *Lapham’s Quarterly*, 6 September 2017. Archived 2 September 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190902095209/https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/fear-white-genocide>. It is also worth reading Jo Livingstone, ‘Racism, Medievalism, and the White Supremacists of Charlottesville’, *The New Republic*, 15 August 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/144320/racism-medievalism-white-supremacists-charlottesville>, accessed September 2019, for the implication of the Middle Ages in this same ideology and rhetoric.
- 94 Brent Nongbri. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. 18. See also Jonathan Z. Smith, ‘God Save This Honorable Court: Religion and Civic Discourse’, in *Writing Religion: The Case for the Critical Study of Religion*, ed. Steven W. Ramey. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015. 17–31.
- 95 Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 24.
- 96 For a brief, readable overview of *medieval* as an adjective to mean backwards, see Eric Wesicott, ‘Stop Calling Trump ‘Medieval’: It’s an Insult to the Middle Ages’, *Vox*, 25 February 2019, 24 May 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190524204422/https://www.vox.com/first-person/2019/2/25/18217156/trump-medieval>; and María Rosa Menocal, *Writing without Footnotes: The Role of the Medievalist in Contemporary Intellectual Life*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2001.
- 97 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 191.
- 98 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 99 In addition, even if ‘Islam was the law’, this does not mean that Jews and Christians did not conduct legal business in their own courts and have recourse to Islamic courts, as well, if they were not happy with the outcome provided by their own community’s legal systems. On the phenomenon of medieval legal pluralism, see Uriel Simonsohn, *A Common Justice: The Legal Alliances of Christians and Jews under Early Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- 100 By way of example of something that a modern person might not consider a religious matter but fell within a religio-legal system in the Middle Ages is a Mamluk-era *fatwa* about whether it is permissible to describe a bald

man as bald and under what conditions it might be permissible to do so; for a discussion of this fatwa, and an analysis of its text and the foundational religious texts that allowed the jurist Ibn Hajar to arrive at his ruling, see Kristina Richardson, *Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012. 111–29.

- 101 Daniel Lasker, 'Karaism in 12th Century Spain', 179. Fernández Morera cites the sentence in Lasker's article that comes before this one, 'Rabbanism, however, was not the only form of Spanish Judaism in that period; there was also a substantial Karaite community living side by side with the Rabbanite population'. Taken together, these two sentences reflect Lasker's maximalist position on the size of a potential Karaite community in Spain; even with that position, he concludes his article by observing that 'We cannot reconstruct with assurance the nature of their religion, the size of their community, their origins, or their fate. Nevertheless, Rabbanite sources indicate that this Jewish group was not negligible' (195). Some scholars agree with him, while others adopt the absolutely minimalist position that there was never a Karaite community in Spain, with the documentary sources reflecting the traces of sojourners and the literary references using the term *heretic* as a more generic insult rather than a reference to a specific population of Karaites. Most historians of Karaism walk a line somewhere in between, holding that there were some Karaites in Spain but probably not a lot. This is not because they seek to minimise the place of Karaism in Spain, but rather because it is all that the documentary record can support. On these various hypotheses of the extent of Karaite presence in the Iberian Peninsula and the dissemination of Karaite ideas, see Ryan Szpiech, 'L'hérésie absente: Karisme et karaïtes dans les œuvres polémiques d'Alfonso de Valladolid', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 182: 196–7. With all of that said, the documentary record is ever-shifting (again, as we shall see below), and it is possible that more evidence will come to light to support the idea of a larger community. However, that evidence, if it exists, is not yet known to scholars.
- 102 Lasker, 'Karaites in Spain', 179.
- 103 A comprehensive bibliography for the study of Karaite history and thought is Barry Dov Walfish and Mikhail Kizilov. *Bibliographia Karaitica: Annotated Bibliography of Karaites and Karaism*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- 104 Meira Polliack, 'Preface', *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Sources*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. xvii.
- 105 John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2009. Book 1, chapter 6, argument 2.
- 106 Firkovitch's letter from Cairo, written in Hebrew and with the term 'disciples of scripture' rendering his Hebrew expression '*benei mikra*' (lit.: sons of the Bible), is published in Menahem Ben-Sasson and Ze'ev Elkin, 'Abraham Firkovitch and the Cairo Genizah: Following Up on a Matter in the Man's Archive', *Pe'amim* 90 (2002): 66–7. The translation of *benei mikra* appears as 'disciples of Scripture' in Peter Cole and Adina Hoffman's *Sacred Trash*. New York: Shocken Books, 2011. 26. One would have to review the studies of Karaites listed in Fernández-Morera's bibliography to divine his source for this very particular — and, again, ultimately very Protestant — phrasing.
- 107 Dan Shapira, 'On Firkowicz, Forgeries, and Forging Jewish Identities', in *Manufacturing a Past for the Present: Forgery and Authenticity in Medieval Texts and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Janos Bak, Patrick Geary, and Gabor Klaniczay. Leiden: Brill, 2015. 157–8.

- 108 On stylistic and philosophical fungibility in extreme-right rhetoric, see Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, New York: Zero Books, 2018. 34–8.
- 109 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 324, n125.
- 110 Fernández-Morera, *The Myth*, 200.
- 111 Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008. xv–xvii.
- 112 Fred Astren, *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding*. Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. 17. It is worth noting that where Astren upholds the idea of Karaism as a sect, it is strictly limited to the literary domain; in other words, he portrays Karaite literature as sub-type of Jewish literature without wading into the social-historical realities of daily life. (Again, this is simply a question of different, recognised, established fields of history-writing rather than of right or wrong approaches to the material.) And even there, Astren notes that ‘the sectarian relationship increasingly was marked by accommodation from one or both parties’ (9).
- 113 Jeff Eleff. ‘Engaging Reform’, chapter 1 of *Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2016. 3–26.
- 114 Interestingly, early reformers sought to align themselves with medieval Karaism, so the notion of parallels between Rabbanite/Karaite and Orthodox/Reform is not without historical foundations; those foundations are not to be found in the Middle Ages, though; they are fully a post-Enlightenment development. It is also worth noting that in spite of what those reformers might have liked to think, from a scholarly perspective there are significant differences between the classical Reform Judaism of nineteenth-century Germany and Karaite Judaism (Astren, *Karaite Judaism*, 17).
- 115 Dario Fernández Morera, *The Myth*, 324, n125; 325, n131.
- 116 Tapani Harvianien, ‘Abraham Firkovich’, in *Karaite Judaism*, ed. Meira Polliack. Leiden: Brill, 2003. 875–92; and Dan Shapira, ‘On Firkowicz, Forgeries, and Forging Jewish Identity’, in *Manufacturing a Past for the Present*, ed. Patrick Geary, et al. Leiden: Brill, 2015. 157–69. For a classic but unfavourable assessment of Firkovich, see Abraham Harkavy, *Altjüdische Denkmäler aus der Krim*. Saint Petersburg, 1876.



*Figure 3.1* Photo of the Casa de América in the Palacio de Linares in Madrid, Spain. Photo by Louie Dean Valencia-García.

### 3 The Black Legend and Its Shadow

#### Re-writing Colonial Narratives, the *Blind Spots of Racism* and the Rise of Conservative Nationalisms

*René Carrasco*

#### Introduction

In an article published in the Spanish newspaper *El País* titled ‘Hispanidad, ¿mala palabra?’ [*Hispanidad*, bad word?] renowned Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa sets out to defend the meaning or, rather, the value of the term *hispanidad* and its implications in Latin America. For the Peruvian author, the term *hispanidad* not only ‘rhymes with *libertad* [freedom]’ but it is also a term that Latin Americans should embrace and not dispute nor associate with what he calls the ‘evils’ of Spain—i.e. fascism, the Franco regime. Much to the contrary, Latin Americans should be ‘thankful’ that it was Spain, one of the many imperial powers of the time, who carried out ‘conquests’ during the sixteenth century and who colonised America and was therefore able to introduce this once savage territory into the great tradition of Western Civilisation. Vargas Llosa makes no qualms about his position, and he is not shy about his opinion on the matter when he states:

thanks to the arrival of the Spanish, Latin America became part of Western culture, that is, an heir of Greece, Rome, the Renaissance, the *Siglo de Oro*, and, in short, of its best traditions: human rights and the culture of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

According to the writer, Spain, its legacy in Latin America and everything else that the term *hispanidad* transmits, should never be a source of shame or embarrassment, but instead a celebration of Western Civilisation and Latin America’s opportunity to participate within it.

At some point in the text, the author does, however, have to deal with the fact that the Conquest of America was a violent and bloody enterprise that actually took place and it affected the lives of the indigenous peoples of the continent at that moment and continues to do so to this very day. Vargas Llosa claims that the negative arguments eschewed by

those who consider *hispanidad* a ‘bad word’ remind him of the ‘indigenists, who associated it – the word *hispanidad* – above all with the “horrors of the Spanish Conquest,” that is, the exploitation of the Indians [sic!] by the *encomenderos*, the destruction of the Inca and Aztec Empires, and the pillaging of their riches’.<sup>2</sup> Without naming it explicitly, what Vargas Llosa is referring to is the narrative we have come to know as the ‘Black Legend’, and its impact in both Spain and Latin America.

For many years now, scholars and academics who study the periods of Conquest and Colonisation of America have regarded the ‘Black Legend’ as a rhetorical trope from the twentieth century that is deployed every time that Spain is condemned for its actions during these events.<sup>3</sup> However, there is also a sort of common understanding that when discussing the ‘Black Legend’ there are other similar narratives that should be discussed, for example the ‘White Legend’ (Hanke, Keen) or what has even been termed the ‘Pink Legend’ (Galeano). Together, these narratives have come to shape our understanding of the events that took place during the conquest and colonisation of America. There are those who for political reasons demonise Spain and its actions in the continent, true; but there are also those who absolve the Iberian country of any wrongdoing in the so-called ‘New World’. The truth, as Charles Gibson points out, is often found somewhere in the middle and any ‘side’ that an individual wants to support in this debate is entirely subjective and open to criticism.

Why, then, would authors María José Villaverde Rico and Francisco Castilla Urbano bring together a group of academics, scholars and intellectuals to publish a book, *La sombra de la leyenda negra* (Tecnos, 2016) that, once again, brings the debate surrounding the ‘Black Legend’ to the forefront? According to them, the purpose was to ‘clean’ the image of Spain in the eyes of the world (i.e. Europe) and to prove that Spain is not an *Orientalised* ‘backwards country’ that is sort-of-not-quite Europe. The editors argue that this image of Spain in the world (i.e. Europe) has done an incredible amount of damage to the brand of Spain but, perhaps more importantly, it has been assumed and internalised by many Spaniards, contributing to the detrimental self-image many of them have of their country and their history.<sup>4</sup> In this way, returning to the topic of the ‘Black Legend’ could, according to the editors, contribute to the ongoing conversation regarding stereotypes and their lasting impact in the national imaginary. By debunking said stereotypes and restoring the ‘truth’ about the Spanish national character, the authors could participate in the ‘fight against racism’ (both in the general sense, and particularly the racism against Spaniards) that has plagued the relationships of Spain and its European counterparts, who the participants in the book continuously and misleadingly refer to as the ‘world community’.

In this chapter, I present an analysis of some of the foundational premises of the book *La sombra de la leyenda negra*.<sup>5</sup> However, and because of space constraints, instead of looking at every chapter/article

that comprises the book as a whole, I will limit my inquiry to the 'Estudio Preliminar' [Preliminary Study] of the book, which was written by the editors who compiled the essays, Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano.<sup>6</sup> The 'Estudio Preliminar' serves as an excellent source to understand the tone of the book and its ideological foundations. Given the eclectic nature of the essays and the various backgrounds of the participants in the edition—all of them joined together around the issue of the 'Black Legend'—I will avoid generalising about the book as a whole and will instead focus on the 'Estudio Preliminar'. Furthermore, I would like to centre my analysis of the 'Estudio Preliminar' around two axes of inquiry: (a) the emphasis on the 'victimization of Spain' within the narrative of the 'Black Legend'; and (b) the *blind spot of racism* in the logic of the attacks against the 'Black Legend' that, while denouncing the racism of the world—i.e. Europe—against Spain, continuously makes racist remarks and statements against the indigenous populations of America without being able to realise the inherent racism of said statements. Through these analytical axes, I argue the insistence on revisiting the polemic surrounding the 'Black Legend' corresponds with a historical moment in which conservative politics and economic policies are making a comeback not just in Spain, but throughout the world. Finally, I contend that a debate or an exposition of ideas and arguments regarding the 'Black Legend' can no longer be held without incorporating the views and perspectives of indigenous peoples in the Americas.

In analysing the origins, rhetoric and historical trajectory of the 'Black Legend', the focus on the victimisation of Spain decentres the crimes and atrocities perpetrated against the indigenous communities of Latin America to emphasise the exaggerations or 'lies' that the main proponents of the 'Black Legend' made regarding Spain. Furthermore, the emphasis on the 'harm of the Black Legend' and what it has done to Spain reinforces Spanish nationalism at a time during which many political entities within the country are fighting to be recognised as autonomous polities—as is the case with Catalunya and the ongoing struggles in Basque Country. Furthermore, the immigrant and refugee crisis in the last decade has forced a critical approach to pre-conceived notions such as 'nation' and 'nationalism' and the ideologies that sustain these concepts.

Finally, the logic of the criticism of the 'Black Legend' in the writings and words of this particular group of writers and scholars makes use of what I have termed a *blind spot of racism* in their argumentation, in that, while denouncing the very racism inherent in the 'Black Legend' that has plagued the image of Spain in the world (although it should be noted that what the authors really care about is the image of Spain within Europe), the authors make use of racist language and remarks. This racism, of course, is directed towards the indigenous populations of Latin America and it is therefore not considered racism at all by the authors. What lays behind this is the European-constructed hierarchy of race and ethnicity, which places all of those non-white cultures and



civilisations below any Western or European standard. In denouncing and pointing out the racism that French philosophers and intellectuals showed against Spain, many of these Spanish authors use racism against the indigenous populations of America. I will, of course, return to this point later. For now, I will begin with the role that is assigned to Spain within this particular version of the 'Black Legend', that of a victim.

### **Victimisation of Spain**

It is, perhaps, not surprising that some members of the Spanish intellectual community see themselves as the 'original victims' of the 'devastating' consequences of the 'Black Legend'. In order to understand this, let us briefly look at what the 'black legend' is and how it was born. According to Charles Gibson, the term

is applied to the traditional literature that criticizes the people, history, and national character of Spain, in part for cruelty in the conquest of native America, and in part for bigotry, pride, hypocrisy, and other more or less undesirable attributes.

(4)

The term itself, coined by Julián Juderías in 1914, is most commonly used by those who look 'with favor upon the action and influence of Spain throughout history' (4). Furthermore, Gibson explains:

To characterize the literature as legendary was, in addition, to objectify and categorize it after the manner indicated above, and especially, in this case, to label it inaccurate and hence defamatory. The anti-Hispanic legend, like any other example of the genre, became a subject for scientific scrutiny, accessible to the presumptively impartial observer through normal methods of scholarly inquiry. To call the legend 'black,' then, was to leave no doubt regarding the observer's real intention, for this made it baneful and lacking in moral light. The subtle phrase 'Black Legend,' with its implications both of objectivity on our part and of propagandistic deceit – or involuntary involvement in propagandistic deceit – on the part of someone else, says in effect that the record of anti-Hispanic criticism is exaggerated, tendentious, excessively critical and factually and ethically wrong.<sup>7</sup>

The term 'Black Legend', then, is used by those who oppose the negative characterisations of Spain and its national character, whether at the time of Conquest and colonisation of America or even prior to that. However, the concept of the so-called 'Black Legend' centres Spain as the main 'victim' of the events that took place during the time of the conquest and colonisation of America. This rhetorical and semantic turn shifts

the attention away from the atrocities committed against the indigenous peoples of America and focuses on the treatment that the Iberian country and its people received from its European counterparts. However, what could be perceived as an innocent and justified displacement of attention can actually be understood as an attempt to 'cover-up' or 'glance over', even if un-intentionally, the situation of indigenous peoples in the continent by not addressing the events that created the conditions that have contributed to their ongoing situation of abjection over the last 500 years. By focusing on the victimisation of Spain, we run the risk of not paying attention to the horrors commonly associated with colonial enterprises, among them rape, pillage and murder and which were, let us not forget, committed by many nations, amongst them, Spain.

In the 'Estudio Preliminar', the authors identify the precise origins of the 'black legend' and they situate it in the thirteenth century. According to them, although the criticisms against Spain in the sixteenth century were mostly related to political and religious aspects, the first 'insults' of an anthropological nature came much earlier. The 'bad press', as the authors call it, that Spain received in Europe began taking shape in Italy, mostly from places like Naples and Sicily, due to the proto-nationalist sentiment that the Aragonese Crown's expansion in the area gave birth to. According to Sverker Arnoldsson, Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), one of the most recognised figures of the Italian Renaissance, had described the Catalan people as 'the vile lineage of mercenaries and traitors',<sup>8</sup> which speaks of the image of the Spanish—if we can historically speak of this concept at that point—in the eyes of its European counterparts as envious, prideful, dishonest, vain, lascivious and, at times, cruel and bloodthirsty.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the authors make use of the remarks by Joseph Pérez to further this argument:

Joseph Pérez is blunt; the Black Legend arose from the Spanish supremacy and the grudges that aroused its military prowess, its territorial expansion, its diplomatic influence, its monetary hegemony and his cultural dominance. Grudges that further increased by the sudden and unexpected incorporation into Europe during the period between 1450–1650 of an until then marginalized country, which suddenly boasts immense power and becomes the paladin of Catholicism.<sup>10</sup>

In this way, according to the authors, the anti-Spanish sentiment that began in Italy soon made its way throughout most of Europe, and it was fuelled, in their estimation, by some sort of mixture of feelings of resentment and jealousy. Later on, and with the events unchained by the conquest and subsequent colonisation of America, other countries, like Germany, the Netherlands, France and England, all began to partake in the sharing and articulating of ideas and statements that were 'negative' towards Spain.

To the list of 'injurious views' that were held about Spain during this time—among them Boccaccio's (1313–1375) claim that Spaniards were 'savages'—the authors also add a racist dimension to the attacks against the Iberian country. According to them, the Islamic and Judaic influence on Spanish culture gave way to many insults and a representation of all things Spanish and categorised them as 'impure' and 'tinted with Jewish blood', among them, for example, the racist slur 'marrano' which was applied, according to the authors, indiscriminately to all Spanish (28). In their own words,

the sarcasm and teasing against the Spaniards became persecutions after the death of Pope Borgia. Similarly, afterwards, Pope Paul IV would express his regret for living under the hegemony of a country like Spain, inferior in culture, race and religion.<sup>11</sup>

(28)

The authors dispute the claims of being called 'savages' and seem to be offended when reminded of the Islamic and Jewish heritage in the cultures that developed in the Iberian Peninsula.

So far, we have seen that the 'Black Legend' was nurtured by two principal factors; (a) the resentment against Spain's political and economic growth; and (b) racist views held by other European countries who saw Spain's cultural heritage as 'dirtied' or 'impure' due to the Islamic and Judaic influence it had received. According to the authors, the waves of 'hostile' Protestantism also contributed and furthered the distressed image of Spain in the eyes of Europe (31). According to British historian Alexander Samson, 'without a doubt, the Black Legend and the Reform are inseparable'.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the authors explain:

Anti-Spanish propaganda presented Spain as a pawn of the Papacy and as the standard bearer of Catholicism. However, there are testimonies that suggest that the Spanish monarchy, far from being governed by religious intransigence in European political conflicts of the 16th and 17th centuries, acted with enormous flexibility, cornering orthodoxy and being guided by strictly political interests.<sup>13</sup>

What this entails is a practical defence in the text of both the Spanish character and the institutions developed in Spain as a counterpart to Anglo Protestantism. The brand of Catholicism practiced by the Iberian country is seen as a beacon of civilisation and, furthermore, the *proper way* of civilising other nations that are seen, both historically and in the text, as either less civilised or, in the worst of cases, completely uncivilised. Dividing the world into two antagonistic fractions, those who are civilised and those who are not, creates a Manichean binary that does not question the civilising mission of Western hegemonic cultures

itself and instead presents it as natural in the process of developing civilisations. In this sense, the authors do not hesitate to identify the colonial enterprise carried out by Spain as necessary and legitimate but also, what is more, as a legal endeavour.

Rhetorically, the authors' argument that Spain was victimised—and they, in fact, go as far as to say that the country has been 'the most victimized'—by the emergence and proliferation of a 'Black Legend' rests on three main points: (a) the envy and resentment against Spain's political and economic dominance; (b) the racist arguments spewed against Spain's Islamic and Judaic heritage, and (c) the rise of hostile Protestantism and its antagonisation towards Catholic faith and the civilisation project it proposes. However, his rhetoric is misleading not so much for what it does state, but for what it does not state, for what it hides and covers up, namely the crimes committed against the indigenous populations of America.

According to the authors, then, the impact of the 'Black Legend' on the *brand* that they call 'Spain' (the use of neoliberal language here is not gratuitous) has been long-lasting, devastating and it has hurt the image of 'Spain' internally—that is, with its own citizens—and externally, with the rest of the European community and the United States. Furthermore, this anti-Spanish campaign that is the 'Black Legend' was also a very racist endeavour. After all, according to the authors of the 'Estudio Preliminar' and some of the participants in the volume, the Spaniards were treated like 'indians' [sic!] themselves.

### **The *Blind Spot* of Racism in the 'Black Legend'<sup>14</sup>**

There is no doubt that a profound sense of racism lays at the foundation of the 'Black Legend', whether we want to believe that it was a sense of racism against the indigenous populations of the Americas, or a racism focused on Spain on behalf of its European counterparts.<sup>15</sup> One of the most interesting characteristics of the 'Estudio Preliminar', however, is that the authors of the text are convinced that the racism in the 'Black Legend' is coming from other European countries—among them France, England, Germany and more—and it is directed against Spain.

In the view of the authors, Spain is the victim of an utterly racist rhetoric that qualifies and characterises it as an uncivilised, uncultured and ultimately ignorant country due to its Semitic and Islamic blood [sic!].<sup>16</sup> The authors of the 'Estudio Preliminar' make use of racist arguments themselves to prove their case. What this entails is that the authors do not perceive their statements as 'racist' nor do they believe that what they are saying is derogatory or even an insult to the indigenous populations of America. To them, to say that indigenous peoples were 'uncivilized', 'blood thirsty', 'ignorant' and many other qualifications of the sort is just the plain and utter truth.

Theirs is a very specific sort of racism that does not assume itself as such; it is the sort of racism encountered by many 'enlightened' Europeans and North Americans who do not consider(ed) themselves racist and who still make use of racist rhetoric to prove their arguments. This is due to the fact that their world-view, their cosmovision, is inevitably racist. Within the centre(s) of the world-system, there lays a perspective that while being racist, it does not assume itself such; this perspective is what I refer to as a *blind spot* of racism. Let me provide some examples from the 'Estudio Preliminar' to further illustrate my argument.

As previously mentioned, the 'Estudio Preliminar' sets the tone for the rest of the book while providing a cultural and historical background to the emergence of the so-called 'Black Legend'. According to the authors of this text, their primary goal is to examine the historic and material conditions that allowed for this 'legend' to be articulated, first in the throes of the sixteenth century, while Spain was, as Vargas Llosa pointed out, bringing civilisation to the Americas, and later during the eighteenth century, while the lights of reason were being lit across Europe but, more specifically, in France. It is their belief that although Spain was certainly not the only country carrying out conquests and colonising territories during this time, it was/is the country that has been the most affected by a negative view and perspective on how these processes of conquest and later colonisation took place. The 'Black Legend', then, has targeted Spain and therefore caused great harm to the Iberian country, negatively affecting the way it is perceived by its European counterparts and, just as important, by many Spaniards themselves.

One of Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano's first rhetorical moves is to displace the focus of the atrocities perpetrated during the conquest of the Americas from specific entities and recognisable names, such as 'the Spanish Crown', 'Spain' or even 'Spanish conquistadores' to more generalising terms such as 'some individuals' or 'a few bad apples'. Afterwards, the authors quote the results of Luciano Pereña's research, which proves that

[t]he population decline in Spanish America was essentially due to the demographic crisis (which limits the responsibility of the conquerors) and that, although initially there were massacres and crimes, they were not attributable to the Crown which never carried out, and much less programmed, the extermination of the Indians.<sup>17</sup>

Providing the readers with this information is not gratuitous, since it further limits the responsibility of the Crown by labelling the otherwise unbelievable diminishing of the (indigenous) population as a 'demographic crisis'. There is no further explanation of *what* or, rather *which* 'demographic crisis' Pereña's research is referring to, nor an explanation of the causes of said 'demographic crisis'. The answers to those questions are, in the end, of no importance to the argument. The importance of

providing the results of Pereña's research without any context that even remotely hinted at those questions was to displace the blame for the crimes perpetrated during the conquest.

Contextualising quotations and notes while providing appropriate background and context is critical when relaying racist statements made by academics and intellectuals in the mid-twentieth century. For example:

American historian [Hubert Herring, in his book *History of Latin America from the Beginnings to the Present* (1955)] argued that Spain had not destroyed large populations of Indians because there never were any. And he added that conquerors like Nuño de Guzmán, Pedro de Alvarado or Diego de Almagro were undoubtedly men of extreme cruelty, but no less than the British, Dutch or French when they had the opportunity to be so.<sup>18</sup>

This quote is problematic for two main reasons: (1) it is historically and factually inaccurate in claiming that there were no 'grandes poblaciones de indios', and (2) it recognises the cruelty of people like Alvarado or Almagro, and then quickly points out that 'everyone else was doing it'; therefore, this cruelty must be understood as common during the time, and not as something that should be perceived or judged negatively. This is not the place to disprove the first claim, that which asserts that there were no 'large populations of Indians'. What is of importance here is to point out that the authors use this false claim, racist in its nature, to further prove their point, and they themselves do not point out that the claims made by Hubert Herring were misleading and uninformed in the 1950s and are misleading and uninformed today. To use his claim as a fact, however, constitutes the articulation of an alternative history, an alt-history, which completely ignores the civilizational achievements of indigenous societies in the Americas.

As the text continues, the authors emphasise the racism of other European countries which considered Spain a very 'Semiticised' and the least Christian country (28), and they persist in displacing the blame of the crimes—perpetrated mostly during the first years of the conquest, according to them—stating that 'it is wrong (and unfair) to denounce three centuries of colonization for what happened during the first half century' and that, 'if mistakes and crimes had been committed, they were attributable to men who acted without any control, but never to the conquering country and even less to the monarchy'.<sup>19</sup> The crimes, however, are justified by some writers, not necessarily Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, and are quoted accordingly. In discussing Saavedra Fajardo's *Idea de un príncipe político-cristiano* (1640), the authors summarise his contribution to the debate over the 'crimes' against the indigenous populations of America in the following way:

Although Saavedra did not deny that in the first time of the Conquest there had been disorders, he claimed that they were severely punished by 'severe commissioners' sent by the Catholic Monarchs. And he justified the ill-treatment of the Indians for being 'idolaters fiercer than the beasts themselves, who had carnages of human flesh, with which they sustained themselves, and who could not be reduced to reason if not with force and rigor'. It exempted the Crown from any responsibility for having given 'paternal orders for its conservation, exempting them from the work of the mines and others who were ordinary among them before the discovery.'<sup>20</sup>

And following that discussion, the authors provide this information as well:

Bernardo de Vargas Machuca, in his book *Apologías y discursos de las conquistas occidentales*, which remained unpublished until the nineteenth century, made a critical examination and a refutation of the *Brevísima* of Las Casas claiming, on the one hand, that indigenous peoples lived in conditions of barbarism that offended God and, on the other, that the Spaniards had to lend a hand, to reduce and civilize them, of legal punishments to which Las Casas described as 'cruelty'. Apparently, Vargas Machuca was fully aware of the damage that the bishop of Chiapas' book, together with the accompanying prints by De Bry, caused to Spain and made reference, in particular, to its use by the Huguenots.<sup>21</sup>

By using other author's words the atrocities against the indigenous populations are minimised, and then some of the facts and numbers of the Conquest themselves become disputed in the text. According to the authors, 'there seems to be consensus that both the numbers of victims and the description of the Conquest were misunderstood'.<sup>22</sup> And, what is more,

[O]f course, the data provided by Hernán Cortés, Fernando de Oviedo, López de Gómara, Fernando Colón or Agustín de Zárate would confirm, as it has already been said, the extreme cruelty of the first years of the conquest. But manipulating the figures to exonerate or blame the conquerors makes it very difficult to weigh the number of victims evenly.<sup>23</sup>

To the authors, the deaths of the indigenous populations of America cannot and should not solely be 'placed in the backs of Spaniards', as they themselves put it:

Regardless of the figures, it is a true fact that there was a demographic crash. It is another thing is that we should place all the dead

on the backs of the conquerors, because we must take into account the devastating power of epidemics [...] But the most surprising thing is [...] that such depopulation took place *a century after* the arrival of the Spaniards and was due to diseases caused by the establishment of missionaries in those areas. As a large number of historians today (from Joseph Pérez to Milhou), the population decline is explained, on the one hand, by diseases (largely contagious because of their novelty, due to the previous isolation in which the Indians had lived) and, on the other, by the trauma of the conquest.<sup>24</sup>

And, furthermore:

After smallpox, it was measles, then a type of typhus and later the flu, in addition to diphtheria, mumps, malaria, yellow fever, and so on. To all this we must add the trauma caused by the conquest itself, which disrupted traditional society and induced many men to let themselves die and women to abort.<sup>25</sup>

Once again, these claims are perhaps misinformed, misleading or framed in an awkward way, which does not, at any rate, make them explicitly racist. What could be perhaps considered racist in this particular discussion are the conclusions at which the authors arrive. Countering the narrative that the deaths of the indigenous populations in America were due in large part to the violence and cruelty with which the Spaniards conducting themselves, and offering other explanations to the ‘diminishing of the population’, the authors conclude with the following:

What can be deduced from all this? In the first place, talking about genocide is inappropriate, as Joseph Pérez emphasizes. As Juan Manuel Forte affirms, despite the looting, pillage, slavery, cruelty or crimes that were committed, at no time was there a decision or political will to exterminate the Indians, but quite the opposite: there was no need to kill the hen of the golden eggs, the working population [...] On the other hand, the Indian legislation and the political guidelines of the authorities and the administration show that a system of political domination and economic exploitation was compatible with evangelization and protection of the Indians.<sup>26</sup>

What is perhaps most striking about this last paragraph is that the authors refer to the indigenous populations as labour, but also using the awkward metaphor of ‘la gallina de los huevos de oro’—‘the hen with the golden eggs’. The argument they are making is as follows: Spain could not be and was not responsible for the massacre of hundreds of thousands [millions!] of indigenous peoples because it would make no sense to kill the people who are working for you—without ‘pay’, no less! To reduce the lives of indigenous peoples to labour force has been



a common trope in overtly racist literature since colonial times, which is understandable since it is also a founding principle of economic models based on the extraction of natural resources and the political systems and structures that they produce, among them capitalism.<sup>27</sup>

The discussion on whether the actions of certain Spaniards, acting erratically and without consent from Spain or the Spanish Crown, can be held responsible for the demographic crisis experienced by the indigenous populations of the Americas is then followed by one of the most concrete examples of overt racism that is found in the 'Estudio Preliminar' and the book as a whole:

In *España inteligible*, Julián Marías referred to the calculations of American professor John Tate Lanning, who, not without a certain dark humor, deduced that if in the fifty years that followed the Conquest every Spanish of those who made up the list of Cristóbal Bermúdez Pata (in *Pasajeros a las Indias*) would have killed an Indian every working day and three on Sundays, it would have been necessary to involve a whole generation of adventurers (including clergy, women and children) to reach the figure that Las Casas provided.<sup>28</sup>

What the authors refer to as 'humor macabro', or 'dark humor' in English, is in fact a humour characterised by a core belief that indigenous life is either of less, or of no importance, than that of their European counterparts. To make jokes about taking the life of indigenous peoples seems not just tasteless, but also tone-deaf in a discussion about racism and the racist aspect of the 'Black Legend'. Furthermore, other than characterising the joke as 'dark humor', the authors do nothing else to lessen the impact or the racist implications of the proclamation. The inability to perceive statements of this nature as 'racist' is precisely what I call the *blind spot* of racism. The life of indigenous peoples is immediately and without questions perceived as less important or as constituting a lower echelon in the hierarchy of human beings.

Indigenous people, in the minds of the authors, are/were savage barbarians and cannibals who possessed no 'real culture' and who were probably even incapable of acquiring any degree of civilisation. The labour of the Spanish conquistadors and missionaries is, therefore, more than justified. In the midst of defending the proper way of writing history and the avoidance of 'anachronisms' and 'ahistorical arguments', the authors explain the correct context in which men like Cortés and Alvarado acted:

On the contrary, it is necessary to place ourselves in the view of some Europeans - more or less impregnated with some humanistic and largely Aristotelian conceptions, with some Christians imbued with strong religious conceptions and with a feeling of superiority - who

contemplated horrified some ‘barbarians’ not always as peaceful as Columbus had painted them, who made human sacrifices and practiced anthropophagy [...] The horror and repulsion before the pile of human skulls found by Hernán Cortés and his soldiers in Tenochtitlán, on the ball court (Tzompantli), it is not so difficult to imagine with very little effort.<sup>29</sup>

The easily imagined horror described by the authors does not end in the sixteenth century, but it is instead experienced again in the eighteenth century:

It is the same horror that someone as enlightened as Feijoo could experience later, and that led him to justify the ‘excesses’ of the conquerors by the nature of the war itself, but also by the perversities of the Indians who were ‘more irrational than some beasts, [and] did what [no] does any gross, which was to feed on individuals of their own kind. Hence, I apologize that ‘those who worked as wild animals were treated as beasts.’<sup>30</sup>

Once again, this is not the place, nor do I have the space to deny or belie the accuracy of the claims made by the authors using other historical figures as mouthpieces. The use of these utterly racist statements without the proper context or without any further explanation that could, perhaps, make them any less racist is troublesome. The depiction of the ‘savage Indian’ pulling hearts out of sacrificed victims or eating the flesh of its own people or perhaps a defeated army is a construct, a product of the racist representation of the sixteenth-century accounts that have inundated the minds of European thinkers since. To use them, however, in a line of argumentation that, amongst other things, claims that the ‘Black Legend’ is a racist rhetoric and discourse that has plagued Spain for centuries, that depicts Spanish people as uncultured and uncivilised is proof that the authors do not see that depiction of the indigenous peoples as racist. Indigenous peoples—wrongfully and tactlessly referred to as ‘Indians’ throughout the book—did eat humans, and had not read Aristotle; therefore, they surely must be savage barbarians.

## Conclusion

The last couple of years in the history of the modern world-system has seen the rise of right-wing conservative thought and policies, and the governments of the world have taken an awkward turn to the right, steering away from ideologies and policies that were being implemented to safeguard some of the most vulnerable populations since the 2000s.<sup>31</sup> The rise of conservative and far-right governments in Latin America and the displacement of what had become known as the ‘new Latin American

left'—a network of social and political movements that created welfare states throughout the region in which governments like those of Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa, Lula da Silva and Cristina Fernández de Krichner attempted to fight neoliberal policies by creating institutions, locally and in the hemisphere, that would allow for a different sort of economic model to work—are a part of the effort by right-wing elites to regain momentum. What does it mean, then, to revive the debate surrounding the 'Black Legend' under the terms that the particular text in question does so?

Throughout the book, there are several instances of denunciation of the treatment that Spain and the Spanish received by Europe and the Europeans. In some of the cases, the authors go as far as to claim, 'we have been treated like Indians!' [sic!].<sup>32</sup> This statement, of course, references the treatment that many American indigenous populations received at the hands of European conquering armies and colonising groups, among them the Spanish. It also reflects the historical 'truth' of the crimes perpetrated against the indigenous peoples of America. The phrase establishes that 'to be treated like an Indian' [sic!] is in no way desirable, and it provides—perhaps unwillingly—a glimpse into the logic and rhetoric of the Spanish national discourse on indigeneity in the Americas. To use this phrase in a line of argumentation in order to demand justice seems, then, cumbersome. It reveals what I have earlier termed a *blind spot* of racism, a perspective that does not assume nor presents itself as 'racist' but that nonetheless articulates racist statements and participates in racist discourse due to its acknowledgement of a supposed hierarchy of human beings in which the indigenous populations of America, in this case, make up the lower strata.

Moreover, by articulating and participating in this racist rhetoric and discourse, the statement reinforces racism itself. The logic would be as follows: Spain has been treated unfairly by Europe; Spaniards have been treated like Indians [sic!] by fellow Europeans; therefore, Indians have been treated unfairly. This line of argumentation, however, does not go into the next step, which would be to ask the question, 'and, well, who treated the Indians [sic!] unfairly?', to which the answer would undoubtedly be, 'European countries, and among them, to no lesser degree, Spain'. How can the subject of the 'Black Legend' be revived in this day and age without taking into consideration the indigenous populations of America and their perspective on it?

A spectre is haunting Europe, and it is the spectre of right-wing conservatism and fascism. Was the 'Black Legend' part misinformation, part exaggeration and part propaganda? Absolutely. Does that mean that we can forget the atrocities perpetrated in the name of Christianity and Western Civilisation against the indigenous populations of the Americas? No, never. Why now? Why attempt to 'clear' the name of Spain in the second decade of the twenty-first century? The answer is obvious. It is no

secret that the peoples of Spain continue to question the national model and the discourse on Spanish nationalism. The region known as Basque Country—Euskal Herria in its original language—has been demanding a re-thinking of the national identity and the national project. Currently, the Catalan region—Catalunya in Catalan—is also attempting to re-negotiate its own identity and its place within the larger national project. Spain, as all other countries in the world, is a product of nineteenth-century liberal economics and a political system that privileged the capitalist mode of production during that time. There was a time, however, during the tormented twentieth century, when Francisco Franco ruled Spain and he demanded that all of its diversity become one. His regime imposed Spanish as the official language in the country, and it silenced all the other voices that spoke their own words throughout the Iberian Peninsula. The world has since become a different place, but the shadow of his regime looms over the place once known as the land of rabbits, Hispania.

The ‘Black Legend’ was a narrative developed in Europe to wage ideological war on the people of Spain and to denigrate its national character. Yes. But America, and the indigenous peoples living here, was decimated by European countries, among them, and to no lesser degree, Spain. It is an intellectually viable endeavour to want to clear the name of the Spanish in the eyes of Europe and to return to a debate that is highly important. It would also be desirable to do so while incorporating the voices, perspectives and opinions of the indigenous peoples of America. Or, do they not matter? Does their opinion about Spain make a difference? Does Spain care about what they have to say?

Debating the importance or the relevance of the ‘Black Legend’ is a difficult and racist endeavour because it does not take the perspective of the indigenous populations of America into account. And it constitutes an awkward and racist endeavour at a time when racist and awkward endeavours are the norm in the world-system. The rise of fascism demands new readings of old texts, revisitings of forgotten commonplaces and the ‘Black Legend’ had to be re-read and revisited. It is, therefore, important that this is not the last time we revisit the issue, and that the next time we do it, we invite indigenous voices and perspectives as equals to the debate. Their experience can never be forgotten, and their voice and perspective must be acknowledged and incorporated every time we mention the so-called ‘Black Legend’.

## Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Original quote, ‘gracias a la llegada de los españoles [América Latina] pasó a formar parte de la cultura occidental, es decir, a ser heredera de Grecia, Roma, el Renacimiento, el Siglo de Oro y, en resumidas cuentas, de sus mejores tradiciones: los derechos humanos y la cultura de la libertad’.

- 2 Original quote, 'indigenistas, que la asociaban [la palabra *hispanidad*] sobre todo a los 'horrores de la conquista Española,' es decir, a la explotación de los indios [sic!] por los encomenderos, a la destrucción de los imperios Inca y Azteca y al saqueo de sus riquezas'.
- 3 For example, Walter Mignolo, the afterward to the compilation *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires* asserts 'The Black Legend is, as stated in the book's introduction, the twentieth century name for a narrative that chastises Castilians for the brutality they committed in the New World, a narrative told from the perspectives of England and dating back to the reign of Elizabeth I' (312). Although the bibliography on the topic of the Black Legend and the discussions it has generated is vast, some of the most recognised works on the subject include Arnoldsson (1960) Keen (1961 and 1971), Hanke (1966), Gibson (1971) as well as the recent contributions of Rabasa (1993), De Guzmán (2005) and Mignolo (2007).
- 4 The presentation of the book took place in the Palacio de Linares, in Madrid, in which the Casa de América is housed. It is also noteworthy to point out that there is a video available of the presentation in which Santiago Miralles the 'director general' of Casa de América, states that it is an honour to present such a 'timely' [*oportuno*] book 'and very interesting' [*y tan interesante*]. The presentation included a debate/discussion with three of the contributors and the two editors, and its main topic was the discussion on how the 'Black Legend' has affected the 'brand' which they call 'Spain'.
- 5 María José Villaverde and Francisco Castilla Urbano, eds., *La Sombra de La Leyenda Negra*, Biblioteca de Historia y Pensamiento Político (Madrid: Tecnos, 2016).
- 6 The full title of the Preliminary Study is 'Estudio Preliminar: La leyenda negra, existencia, origen, recepción y reacciones'. I will hereafter refer to it simply as 'Estudio Preliminar.'
- 7 Villaverde and Castilla Urbano, *La Sombra de La Leyenda Negra*, 4–5.
- 8 Original quote, 'la vil estirpe de mercenarios y traidores.' Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 26.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Joseph Pérez es contundente: la leyenda negra surgió de la supremacía española y de los rencores que suscitó su poder militar, su expansión territorial, su influencia diplomática, su hegemonía monetaria y su dominio cultural. Rencores incrementados aún más por la súbita e inesperada incorporación a Europa durante el periodo 1450–1650 de un país marginado hasta entonces, que de repente hace gala de un poderío inmenso y se convierte en el paladín del catolicismo. Ibid., 25.
- 11 Original quote, 'los sarcasmos y las burlas contra los españoles se convirtieron en persecuciones, a la muerte del papa Borgia. También más tarde, el papa Paulo IV manifestaba su pesar por vivir bajo la hegemonía de un país como España, inferior en cultura, raza y religión.' Ibid., 28.
- 12 Ibid., 31. Original quote, 'no hay lugar a dudas de que la Leyenda Negra y la Reforma son inseparables'.
- 13 Ibid., 32. La propaganda anti-española presentaba a España como un peón del Papado y como la abanderada del catolicismo. Sin embargo, hay testimonios que apuntan a que la monarquía española, lejos de regirse por la intransigencia religiosa en los conflictos políticos europeos de los siglos XVI y XVII, actuó con una enorme flexibilidad, arrinconando la ortodoxia y guiándose por intereses estrictamente políticos.
- 14 It is important to remember that what we call *racism* is nothing more than the deviation from the modern/colonial 'norm', established precisely during

the period of colonial modernity, of certain subjects perceived as 'inferior' from said 'racial' or ethnic norm. Furthermore, Indians and Africans were the object on which the external colonial difference was established: they were cast ontologically inferior and epistemically disabled. Later, in the twentieth century, Jews became the targets of internal colonial difference, not so much because of their ontological or epistemic inferiority as because they endangered the homogeneity of the nation-state. However, the state control of knowledge was the basic weapon for racial classification' (Mignolo, 'Racism as We Sense It Today' 1737).

- 15 As Mignolo has pointed out: 'The internal and external colonial differences did not exist before the sixteenth century. Although Africa and Africans were already classified in Christian cosmology as descendants of Ham, Noah's cursed son, and although Christians and Jews were in tension since the origins of Christianity, neither difference was understood as colonial. Colonial difference was an invention of Christianity in the sixteenth century, and its consequences have been enormous. One of the meanings of *Ham* was 'black.' The conjunction of being cursed and being black, with the fact that Ham's descendants expanded throughout Africa and the current Middle East, brought into the picture the blackamoor. When Elizabeth I of England launched a campaign against the brutality of Spaniards against the Indians (known today as the 'black legend'), the Spanish were likened to blackamoors, which underlined the close connections between Spain and Muslims from North Africa [...] Moors and blacks were thus conflated as undesirable persons in Christian Europe and used to establish the internal imperial difference between England (a wannabe empire) and Spain (a leading imperial force)' ('Racism as We Sense It Today' 1738).
- 16 Racial classification and racism cannot be separated from its link to the civilisational ideal that was capitalism, as Mignolo states:

The resulting historical configuration is messy: a heterogeneous historicostructural node mapping the emergence of the racial matrix, the modern-colonial world, and the foundation of capitalist economy. Capitalism, an emerging civilizational ideal in tension but not in conflict with Christianity needs racism: first, to assert its identity and to justify its will to power, second to justify its expropriation of land and exploitation of labor. The messy historical configuration has therefore an underlying logical structure: Christian theology was confronted with equivalent and competing religious ideas (Jewish and Muslim); with a diversity of people in the New World, all of whom Christians, applying Occam's razor called Indians and declared that they lacked religion and therefore were victims of the mischievous and perverse designs of the devil; and finally with a complex population who descended from Ham and became a confusing mixture of blackamoors – that is, Moors as Muslims and simultaneously black, who could have been Muslim or not in Europe and Africa, and African blacks, who were enslaved, were transported to the New World from different African kingdoms, and varied in language, religion, and history. The Spanish Inquisition in 1505 established some order in this field; it was the first modern state-regulating institution. In retrospect, the racial matrix (and the historical foundation of racism as we know it today) is a combination of two structures, one religious and one secular. Both Christian theology and European egology (e.g., in the sense of Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant) controlled and managed racial classification.

(1738)

- 17 Original quote, 'la disminución de la población en la América española se debió esencialmente a la crisis demográfica (lo que limita la responsabilidad de los conquistadores) y que, si bien en un comienzo hubo masacres y crímenes, no fueron imputables a la Corona que jamás realizó y menos programó el exterminio de los indios', Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 18.

- 18 Original quote,

El historiador estadounidense [Hubert Herring, en su libro *History of Latin America from the Beginnings to the Present* (1955)] argumentaba que España no había destruido grandes poblaciones de indios porque nunca las hubo. Y añadía que conquistadores como Nuño de Guzmán, Pedro de Alvarado o Diego de Almagro fueron sin duda hombres de extrema crueldad, pero no menos que los británicos, holandeses o franceses cuando tuvieron la oportunidad de serlo.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 21

- 19 Original quote,

es erróneo (e injusto) denunciar tres siglos de colonización por lo acaecido durante el primer medio siglo [...] si se habían cometido errores y delitos, eran imputables a hombres que actuaban sin fiscalización alguna, pero jamás al país conquistador y menos aún a la monarquía.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 39

- 20 Original quote,

Aunque Saavedra no negaba que en la primera época de la Conquista se hubieran producido desórdenes, aseguraba que fueron duramente castigados por 'severos comisarios' enviados por los Reyes Católicos. Y justificaba los malos tratos a los indios por ser 'idólatras más fieros que las mismas fieras, que tenían carnicerías de carne humana, con que se sustentaban, los cuales no podían reducirse a la razón si no era con la fuerza y el rigor'. Eximía a la Corona de toda responsabilidad por haber dado 'paternales órdenes para su conservación, eximiéndolos del trabajo de las minas y de otros que entre ellos eran ordinarios antes del descubrimiento.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 40

- 21 Original quote,

Bernardo de Vargas Machuca, en su libro *Apologías y discursos de las conquistas occidentales* que quedó inédito hasta el siglo XIX, hizo un examen crítico y una refutación de la *Brevísima* de Las Casas alegando, por un lado, que los indígenas vivían en unas condiciones de barbarie que ofendían a Dios y, por otro, que los españoles tuvieron que echar mano, para reducirlos y civilizarlos, de castigos *jurídicos* a los que Las Casas calificaba de «crueldades. Según parece, Vargas Machuca era plenamente consciente de los daños que el libro del obispo de Chiapas, junto con las estampas de De Bry que lo acompañaban, causaban a España y hacía referencia, en particular, a su utilización por los hugonotes.

- 22 Original quote, '[p]arece haber consenso en que se malinterpretaron tanto las cifras de víctimas como la propia descripción de la Conquista', Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 42.

- 23 Original quote,

Desde luego los datos aportados por Hernán Cortés, Fernando de Oviedo, López de Gómara, Fernando Colón o Agustín de Zárate confirmarían, como

ya se ha dicho, la extrema crueldad de los primeros años de la conquista. Pero la manipulación de las cifras para exonerar o culpar a los conquistadores hace muy difícil ponderar ecuánimemente el número de víctimas.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 43

- 24 Original quote, Independientemente de las cifras, es un hecho cierto que hubo un desplome demográfico. Otra cosa es que haya que cargar sobre las espaldas de los conquistadores todos los muertos, porque hay que tener en cuenta el poder devastador de las epidemias [...] Pero lo más sorprendente es [...] que dicha despoblación tuvo lugar *un siglo después* de la llegada de los españoles y fue debida a enfermedades provocadas por el establecimiento de los misioneros en esas zonas. Como sostiene hoy un gran número de historiadores (desde Joseph Pérez a Milhou), la disminución de la población se explica, por un lado, por las enfermedades (en gran parte contagiosas por su novedad, debido al aislamiento previo en que habían vivido los indios) y, por otro, por el traumatismo de la conquista.

- 25 Original quote,

Después de la viruela, fue el sarampión, luego un tipo de tifus y más tarde la gripe, además de la difteria, las paperas, la malaria, la fiebre amarilla, etcétera. A todo ello hay que sumar el trauma provocado por la propia conquista, que trastocó la sociedad tradicional e indujo a muchos hombres a dejarse morir y a las mujeres a abortar.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 45

- 26 Original quote,

¿Qué podemos deducir de todo ello? En primer lugar que hablar de genocidio es impropio, como subraya Joseph Pérez. Como afirma Juan Manuel Forte, a pesar del saqueo, pillaje, esclavitud, crueldades o crímenes que se cometieron, en ningún momento hubo una decisión o voluntad política de exterminar a los indios, sino todo lo contrario: no había que matar a la gallina de los huevos de oro, la población laborable [...] Por otro lado, la legislación indiana y las directrices políticas de las autoridades y de la administración demuestran que se buscó hacer compatible un sistema de dominación política y de explotación económica con la evangelización y la protección de los indios.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 46

- 27 For more on this, see Memmi (1991).

- 28 Original quote,

En *España inteligible*, Julián Marías se refería los cálculos del profesor americano John Tate Lanning, quien, no sin cierto humor macabro, deducía que si en los cincuenta años que siguieron a la Conquista cada español de los que integraban la lista de Cristóbal Bermúdez Pata (en *Pasajeros a las Indias*) hubiera matado a un indio cada día laborable y tres los domingos, hubiera sido necesaria la implicación de toda una generación de aventureros (incluyendo clérigos, mujeres y niños) para alcanzar la cifra que maneja Las Casas.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 44–5

- 29 Original quote,

Hay que situarse, por el contrario, en la óptica de unos europeos – más o menos impregnados de algunas concepciones humanistas y en gran



medida aún aristotélicas, de unos cristianos imbuidos de fuertes concepciones religiosas y de un sentimiento de superioridad – que contemplaban horrorizados a unos ‘bárbaros’ no siempre tan pacíficos como los había pintado Colón, que hacían sacrificios humanos y practicaban la antropofagia [...] El espanto y la repulsión ante la pila de cráneos humanos encontrada por Hernán Cortés y sus soldados en Tenochtitlán, en la cancha de pelota (*Tzompantli*), no es tan difícil de imaginar por poco que nos esforcemos.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 47

30 Original quote,

Es el mismo horror que podía experimentar más tarde un ilustrado como Feijoo, y que le llevaba a justificar los ‘excesos’ de los conquistadores por la naturaleza de la propia guerra, pero también por las perversidades de los indios que eran ‘más irracionales que las mismas fieras, [y] hacían lo que [no] hace bruto alguno, que era alimentarse de los individuos de su propia especie’. De ahí que disculpara que ‘fuesen tratados como fieras los que en todo obraban como fieras.

Villaverde Rico and Castilla Urbano, 48–9

31 This awkward turn to the right is perhaps best exemplified in the governments of Donald Trump (USA, 2017), Jair Bolsonaro (Brasil, 2019), prime minister Matteo Salvini (Italy 2018), and Víctor Orban (Hungary), the presidential campaign of Marine Le Pen (France) and the political organisation Vox (Spain).

32 One of the most striking lines of argumentation appears in Villaverde Rico’s contribution to the volumen and, while documenting the ‘racist’ sentiment against Spain, states the following: ‘En 1687 el médico valenciano Juan de Cabriada, exponente de los *novatores*, retomaba una expresión utilizada por los arbitristas de las épocas anteriores: España – se lamentaba – quedaba excluida de la difusión de las luces ‘¡como si fuéramos indios!’ Y el padre Feijoo, en 1731 se quejaba de que ‘regulan a España por la vecindad de la África. Apenas nos distinguen de aquellos bárbaros, sino en idioma y religión (205–6). [In 1687 the Valencian doctor Juan de Cabriada, exponent of the *novatores*, resumed an expression used by the arbiters of the previous times: Spain—he lamented—was excluded from the diffusion of the lights ‘as if we were Indians!’ And the Father Feijoo, in 1731, complained that ‘they regulate Spain because of the neighborhood of Africa. They hardly distinguish us from those barbarians, but in language and religion’].

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*Figure 4.1* Marine Le Pen standing in front of a golden statue of Joan of Arc during her meeting for the celebration in Paris, France on 1 May 2011. Frederic Legrand—COMEEO/Shutterstock.com.

## 4 The Far Right and Women's History

*Charlotte Mears*

The political ideology of the far right, particularly groups associated with Christian Identity and the censorship of the feminine, has done little to warm themselves to the minds of women. Their policies and ideologies, particularly those focused on the control of women's bodies, which are displayed in their anti-abortion stance, fight against work equality and traditionalist views of family structure,<sup>1</sup> have cast women as inferior to men and as such in need of a secondary space in society. However, the contemporary far right's desire for political legitimacy has resulted in the sanitisation of their previous relationship with women. The manner in which they have aimed to rectify this relationship is through a new interpretation of the past.

As seen in Britain, France and the United States, figures of national identity have been co-opted into new narratives defined by the far right that seek to use images of popular imagination as symbols for nationalistic politics. The re-emergence of populism within European politics has reinvigorated previously dormant narratives of national identity. These far-right political parties have appropriated national saints that they see as embodying the traditionalism of their homeland and a xenophobia of outsiders. For example, in England St George has come to represent the anti-immigration stance of the English Defence League, whilst Saint Leopold in Austria has a recognised affiliation with the right-wing Freedom Party.<sup>2</sup> This chapter seeks to analyse the particular way the radical right has changed histories of women to benefit their own political aims. This topic highlights an important contemporary issue in the discussion of the far right's growing legitimacy across Europe. Through these false, misleadingly, and curated narratives gaining credence and wider distribution, the radical right is attempting to change women's role in society through a revision of the roles women have previously played in history. To understand the trend this chapter will focus on three case studies: the use of the images of Joan of Arc in France, of the biblical figures Mary Magdalene and Eve in the Christian Identity movement and a reimagining of women Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members by the contemporary KKK. Each is reflective of different far-right groups' ideas concerning women and how they have manipulated accepted history to better suit

their views. Although the figures and political beliefs of the groups differ, they have all had a damaging affect to both women's history and gender studies.

### Joan of Arc and National Rally

Perhaps one of the most blatant uses and abuses of the history of women in political discourse can be found in France. The far-right nationalist party 'National Rally' (*Rassemblement National*), until 2018 known as the Front National,<sup>3</sup> has used the famous French heroine and saint, Joan of Arc, as a symbol for its political beliefs, appropriating her image to fit with their anti-immigrant stance, and their view of a modern, but conservative France.<sup>4</sup> This narrative has been constructed entirely by the far right.

Joan of Arc has long been a contentious figure within French history. Her story is that of a young girl hearing the word of a God who urged her to cast out the English occupiers within French territory and restore the French monarchical line. Ultimately, Joan is betrayed by the very king she sought to save, placing the monarchy of France in contestation to God, and paving the way for democracy, although several centuries later.<sup>5</sup> The historical deeds are well noted, and her own words survive through the transcripts of her trial. Therein it is not so much the deeds that are disputed, but rather, they are morphed by political entities through a redefinition of her symbolism and motivation. The history of Joan of Arc is further complicated by the 'abandonment' and 'rediscovery' of Joan and her subsequent use as a political tool in the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Her use by political factions has typically been limited to conservative groups, used to emphasise the decline in morality of French society and to reinstate their position as the leaders of freedom and democracy.<sup>7</sup> To some, Joan is seen as the original freedom fighter, forcing out injustice and forging the path of holy righteousness. Her canonisation in 1920, after a lengthy campaign by the Catholic Church, is further evidence of her repeated use as a political tool—in this setting she is used to combat the decline in church attendance and thus the diminishing power of the Church in French political life.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that Joan as a face of politics is not a new phenomenon.

It is of interest for this study to analyse the means by which the figure of Joan of Arc has been changed by the National Rally party as a means to give symbolic significance to arguments about political ideology. When viewed through the lens of the racist stance of the right, Joan becomes a figure of ethnic cleansing. She is not a soldier for king, but rather a liberator of the French from invading cultural forces which seek to change French values and replace them with their own.<sup>9</sup> This is contrasted to the situation in contemporary France and the far right's perceived invasion by Muslims. Through this transmutation of ideas, the lineage of Joan,

as a saviour of the nation, is passed down to National Rally president Marine Le Pen, and thus only National Rally can force back the new invaders. Through National Rally's identification with Joan, they seek legitimacy for the perceived new peril facing France and demand that action must be taken. The imagery of Joan of Arc indicates that again these invading forces must be pushed out to save France and that this is Gods' divine will. For National Rally, the influx of Islam is not sanctioned by God. They do, however, have His blessing to continue Joan's crusade.

The importance of Joan as figurehead for National Rally is given further value when compared to the manner in which Marine Le Pen seeks to represent herself. She has sought to model herself as the embodiment of a present-day Joan. Personified as the saviour that France needs, Le Pen portrays herself as a modern-day Joan of Arc that will save France from its immigrant peril. Markedly, for this affiliation to be recognised, a yearly pilgrimage is made by Le Pen to the statue of Joan in Paris. Furthermore, Le Pen even announced her presidential campaign in front of the famous bronze statue. The statue dominated photographs of Le Pen and further emphasised the party's unity and the special relationship they have coveted with Joan of Arc. The closeness of Le Pen with the familiar statue of Joan further cemented her own vision of herself as the new righteous warrior of France.<sup>10</sup> Within this constructed narrative it is merely the foe that has changed in the battle to save France. No longer is it the English that must be expelled to save France from ruin but immigrants, and specifically Muslims. Le Pen's rhetoric focuses on the threat that these new immigrants have to traditional French life, likening the settling of Muslims in France to 'foxes in a henhouse'.<sup>11</sup> Employing a violent rhetoric, a matter of life and death within this struggle is created. It is clear here the inseparable ideas within this hyperbole between Joan of Arc and Le Pen.

These links between the feminine as the saviour of nation through remarkable deeds are further seen in the association between Boudicca, the legendary female tribe leader, who was able to cast out the Romans, at least temporarily, from England and the campaign by the far right for immigration reform.<sup>12</sup> There is a repeated forced association between Boudicca and Joan. Boudicca is representative of an imagined traditional way of living for Anglo-Saxons, in a similar role to which Joan serves for the French far right—embodying an image of virtuous tradition of country and nationalistic pride that must be protected from outsiders at all costs. Their image, both as warriors who fought to protect their homeland from outsiders, is now used by the far right as a call to arms for new recruits. Again, the homeland must be protected, and new warriors are needed for this fight to protect tradition and nation. This supposed threat forges links between the parties who have employed these figureheads of history and correlates the party's political aims with national salvage.

The case of Joan of Arc and the National Rally party offers a clear example in the manner that far-right political parties operate in terms of propaganda. They seek to use established figures of history and popular memory and then embed them with their own political beliefs. This forged connection is able to offer a closer link of shared understanding and symbolism between these parties and wider society. Furthermore, this connection provides a sense of legitimacy for the party's political thought that otherwise may have been missing, especially in the contentious narrative in which the far right often exists. Within their version of France, they have warped the figure of Joan of Arc, celebrated icon of the Church and a hero of national pride into an anti-immigration, anti-LGBTQ+ and staunch conservative to suit their own political ideology and iconography.<sup>13</sup> This creates a dangerous precedent of adding legitimacy to far-right thought.

### Christian Identity

In the United States, many Christian politicians located on the right have begun to question and give new perspectives to previously held stereotypes on the representation of Christian women. The process of re-evaluation is undertaken to seek an explanation for the modern-day political climate, but chiefly to promote a racist and misogynistic doctrine on the status of women in society and a supposed racial hierarchy in the eyes of God.<sup>14</sup> This has been conducted by challenging established narratives of women in the Bible. The transference of connotations of the fallen woman is witnessed most often with the biblical figures of Eve and Mary Magdalene. While it is without argument that many of the organisations within the Christian right continue to venerate the idea of woman as mother, Eve embodies the role of mother to mankind, she is increasingly associated with the figure of Magdalene—a much more polemic woman who is often linked with the whore narrative.<sup>15</sup> This change in representation is for a multitude of interlinked reasons, but chiefly is due to a desire to undermine feminine power and limit the role of women within politics and church life, whilst continuing to foster the tradition of male dominance.

The countenance of Eve as sinner has been used for centuries as the justification for women's second-class status in the eyes of the Christian church. 'Original sin' is Eve's sin and thus womankind's. However, in mainstream Christianity this militant misogyny has been tempered to a relaxation of the argument, and instead Eve is represented as the archetypal Mother. She is from where all subsequent mankind came. This is challenged in far-right Christian groups such as the Kingdom of Heaven ministry, a branch of the Christian Identity movement that bases their views on Eve as seen through the 'Seed Theory',<sup>16</sup> a racist doctrine that claims only white humanity was created by the union of Adam and Eve. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, it is Kingdom of Heaven's

belief that other races were formed by God earlier in the creation story falling under the heading of 'Beasts'.<sup>17</sup> Further in this rewriting of Genesis, Jews are a product of Eve without Adam, establishing the narrative of whore as the by-product of her union with the snake, representative of Satan. According to Kingdom Identity Ministry doctrinal statement which can be found in correspondence and on their website:

WE BELIEVE in an existing being known as the Devil or Satan and called the Serpent (Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:9), who has a literal 'seed' or posterity in the earth (Gen. 3:15) commonly called Jews today (Rev. 2:9; 3:9; Isa. 65:15). These children of Satan (John 8:44–47; Matt. 13:38; John 8:23) through Cain (I John 2:22, 4:3).<sup>18</sup>

Within Christian Identity doctrine womanhood is to blame for the Jews, the opponents of Christianity. Blamed within these groups for a multitude of sins, the death of Jesus but also the continuing threat to America and Christian whiteness, Jews are perceived as the devil incarnate on Earth. The doctrinal statement continues:

Who have throughout history always been a curse to true Israel, the Children of God, because of a natural enmity between the two races (Gen. 3:15), because they do the works of their father the Devil (John 8:38–44).<sup>19</sup>

Within the Christian Identity original sin narrative, women are held responsible for the sins of lust, disobedience and the creation of evil; the woman must be wary of repeated transgressions. This apprehension about committing further sin allows for the continuation of male dominance within the Christian Identity. The Christian Identity movement's Eve narrative seeks to foster the continued patriarchal dominance within its ranks and forever links women with sin.

The symbolism of control and male dominance in the fringe movement of Christian Identity is further reflective of the continued disdain for women held by the radical right. It is also seen in many aspects of the mainstream Christian right who continue to place women in a secondary position.<sup>20</sup> It exemplifies the practice of utilising already established historical figures that are widely recognised and overlaying them with new symbolism, characteristic of the rights' beliefs. This process adds a sense of legitimacy that would otherwise be lacking from their political theories if they were statements made into a void. An example of this practice is seen in the literature distributed in regard to the 'Seed theory' by Kingdom Ministries; Eve is described as willingly laying with the Devil.<sup>21</sup> Here she is mother second, whore first. According to the racist ideology of Kingdom Ministries, she is responsible for the creation of the Jewish nation and as such for the world's problems; she created 'The children of



Belial' or the Devil's children.<sup>22</sup> She and, by extension, womanhood as a whole are responsible. This allows the ongoing reasoning for male dominance within these groups, because if Eve, mother of the white race, was unfit to control herself—unable to withstand temptation—, then all women must be controlled, to save themselves.

### **Redefining Eve and Mary Magdalene**

The redefining of female actions within the Bible to better suit the warped narrative of the far right is seen with numerous figures other than Eve. Most noticeably transformed by male dominated political society is the figure of Mary Magdalene, long cowed under the shawl of prostitution and promiscuity. This is the image that has continued to the present day; Magdalene is the fallen woman returned to the 'righteous' path by Jesus. However, as her story has begun to morph from that of prostitute to confidant, this is not a reclamation of female autonomy but rather a vindication of the roles that women can fill and still be seen as pure and worthy of God.<sup>23</sup> The redefining of Magdalene's role could initially be considered a better fate for Mary. She is shown to have been redeemed from her previously conferred upon sins; however, this change is an undermining of her character in a different manner. For Mary to be considered a worthy compatriot of Jesus she must be removed from the narrative of whore. Thus, Mary Magdalene is no longer in control of her own body. For her to be allowed power or a righteous role in the Bible she must be innocent, there is no middle ground for a woman to hold. For her to be realised and recognised as a figure of any worth by the Christian far right, she must become mother. This is a further symbolisation of the changing narrative of women to depict their standing in society.

Female figures of the Bible have been given new interpretations by the Christian far right in an attempt to undermine female emancipation and feminism, whilst promoting their own ideals on womanhood. The Christian Identity movement has conferred upon Eve not just her original sin but another more devastating judgement. She has created white men's supposed greatest enemy—Judaism. Through further changes in narration on the role of Mary Magdalene as well, as with others within the Bible, the Christian far right are able to express their anti-feminist beliefs with God's word. There are many examples of this, one of can be seen in Colossians 3:18: 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord' or most emphatically linking woman with whore and sin in Revelation 17:5,6 'The mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth'.<sup>24</sup> All seek to emphasise woman as being sinful and secondary in nature to men. This process of redefining women of the past and giving them new characteristics to emphasise ideological beliefs is undertaken similarly with Joan of Arc, and is conducted as an attempt to give unconventional political ideas a sense of legitimacy through their connection to established figures.

## Alt-History

The issue of gender continues to be a thorny issue for many organisations within far-right organisations such as the KKK; the increasing need for much of the far right to appear female friendly has provoked a rewriting of the organisation's own history in an attempt to appeal to a wider section of society. The resurgence of the KKK within the contemporary political sphere is a reflection of the growing trend towards populism and the attempt to legitimise racism within the United States, and in a wider context the world.<sup>25</sup> The resurgence in popularity of the group is of importance for this section which seeks to identify the unknown history of women in the KKK and the affect this has had on the role of women in present-day Klan political thought.<sup>26</sup> First, it must be emphasised that women's history has often been suppressed by the very organisation of which women are members.<sup>27</sup> The repression of women's history is a continuation of the practice in far-right organisations to assert male dominance and diminish women's power and position in society.

The Women's Ku Klux Klan (WKKK) was an offshoot branch of the much larger all-male Klan that is typically the subject when referencing the 'Klan'. The racist organisation was also at its core extremely misogynistic, seeking not only to end black suffrage but also to prevent women from gaining the vote. The WKKK strongly opposed the attempts to



*Figure 4.2* Women members lead a 1928 Ku Klux Klan parade on Pennsylvania Avenue. Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com.

shackle their political rights and believed that white women could be extremely useful in politics, providing a larger white percentage of the voting population. The WKKK employed different methods to the male Klan in their political activism, seeking non-violent pamphleteering and political campaigning, attempting to promote their racist agenda through legal and political means. Over 500,000 women were part of the Klan during its heyday in the 1920s, with chapters in the majority of states; they were a large organised force of women.<sup>28</sup> However, despite its size, the WKKK is an organisation that has largely been left out of history, both due to the racist organisation the women were part of, barring them from mainstream recognition and within the Klan itself, where women's roles are seen as secondary in importance to that of men.

As the radical right increasingly seeks to extend its profile and gain legitimacy in the eyes of society, they have sought to reinterpret their history and the means by which they portray certain groups to gain political credibility. Today, a chief method that they are employing to bolster their numbers is through the recruitment of women. To be successful in this endeavour to gain power through democratic means, they must first legitimise themselves in the eyes of women.<sup>29</sup> Due to this need for a wider voting base they have begun to re-examine the organisation's own history and draw from its depths tales of women that they consider inspiring. This is an attempt to change the male dominated history of the group into something more palatable for their prospective female recruits. Within this devised fictional narrative discussion centres around the organisation's early feminist attempts to secure the vote for women and emphasises that there is a place within the movement for women. This narrative is created in reference to the WKKK and is an attempt to reconfigure the history the KKK had previously omitted. To claim the KKK is a feminist organisation is nonsensical. The WKKK campaigned extensively for women's suffrage; however, this was a sharp divide in ideology between the Klan and was the impetus for the creation of a separate women's KKK organisation in the first place. Today, it is now evident that the male Klan is willing to embrace these differences and women's suffrage if this change to history can attract new supporters. Before feminism can be claimed by the women of the WKKK, the motivation behind these claims must be analysed, and while undeniably the women wanted the right to vote this was primarily a means to fulfil a racist ideology. These tactics of rewriting history to suit the organisations contemporary aims visualise the dangerous precedent that is occurring within the far right. This example of the WKKK shows that through a reinterpretation of history, the KKK is able to transform their misogynistic history into an account that is much more palatable for twenty-first-century women and furthermore sanctifies their organisation as championing the feminist cause.

The methods that the KKK employ in their attempts to change the way women who were previously involved with the Klan are remembered can be seen through their mutation of the history of specific women and

their roles. A case in point of this is in reference to Alma Bridwell White, who was named the first female bishop of the United States in 1918.<sup>30</sup> Within far-right exchange she is lauded as the first feminist in America. Their interpretation of her life is as a fighter for women's suffrage, which she claimed was biblically mandated. Her position as the first female bishop in America is conventionally something that should be celebrated as an accomplishment for women. However, White is only a figure of esteem within the KKK due to her ideological conviction that only white protestant women should gain the vote. This, coupled with her racism and extreme intolerance for those of differing beliefs, marks her as a rare symbol of feminism with which the radical could associate. Within one of the many books published in accord with the Klan, White states: 'It is within the rights of civilization for the white race to hold the supremacy; and it is no injustice to the coloured man'.<sup>31</sup>

White's public involvement with the Klan, which included numerous cross burnings held on her Church grounds, and her contributions to Klan publications further demonstrate her racist beliefs. Furthermore, she spoke frequently about her beliefs in the wickedness of Judaism and its perversion of white Christian women in church sermons and at public events. Alma Bridwell White has largely been forgotten by mainstream society; however, she has seen a resurgence in popularity as a figure of the radical right, due to her association with feminism; she is now housed in the Litany of the Saints and enjoys a particular fondness in her home state of New Jersey.<sup>32</sup> The racist and hateful speech of White is reconfigured by the KKK as a propaganda tool in attracting the votes of women. With their sanitisation of White into the first feminist, supported by God, they are able to cleanse the Klan's history and make it more palatable for women.

The prevalence of far-right groups, such as the KKK, rewriting the history of their organisations in an attempt to gain credibility in the eyes of society is widespread. This rewriting of history to gain credibility in the eyes of women is seen not only in organisations such as the KKK but also in the reclamation of the mother's movement in the Second World War and in the black shirts reinvention of Margherita Sarfatti from Mussolini's biographer to the mother of Fascism in Italy.<sup>33</sup> This is particularly demonstrated in the ways the KKK has chosen to reconstruct its past in regard to women as the group increasingly attempts to draw women into their ideology and to support their organisations. This leads to a reinterpretation of past events, exemplified in the workings of the KKK, a group which now embraces the history of its feminine counterpart the WKKK, which previously was shunned. This re-evaluation of the past has worked effectively at bringing women into the far right, as they are no longer considered the enemy; they now have a home at which to exploit their racist views. Due to the change in women's position, they are no longer one of the groups outwardly persecuted, thus allowing a feeling of safety and solidarity amongst members. Women are important to the far right in this conception of the past and are now necessary for the right to reach its goals.

## Conclusion

This chapter aimed to discuss and provide new insight into the manner in which the far-right creates alt-histories that better serve their agenda. Through commandeering historical narratives and warping them to suit their own policies and ideology the radical right is able to gain legitimacy for their beliefs through association with these women of the past. This was a central theme throughout the three case studies discussed; through the transference of their dogma onto already established figures and narratives the far right has been able to gain a sense of legitimacy. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of Joan of Arc and figures of national identity that are repurposed by the far right. The links that Le Pen and National Rally have created between Joan of Arc through both ideological overlaying of ideas and the physical connection that Le Pen has sought to establish have created a universal connection between the two. Joan, a fifteenth-century figure, now serves as a popular symbol for the far right in France. These connections are dangerous for wider society who are less likely to challenge a partial truth with heritage, creating a precedent for acceptance of far-right ideology.

When the far right transforms history they are able to take control of the past and can redefine the actions of themselves and their opposition into something more palatable for the outsider. This then increases their standing in society and can help to promote themselves as heroic—other history is against them and they are the victim. This is seen through the KKK and the recreated narrative of the role of the Klan in feminism and in the campaign of suffrage for women. The past has been warped to portray the Klan as seeking equality for women, which is factually untrue. However, the Klan is not the only group to utilise these methods, and the transformation of history is also seen in the Christian Identity movement and many others, which have warped the past and given it new metaphors that emphasise their political views or are able to explain past reprehensible behaviour.

The fabricated accounts of the past created by the far right are an important part of their attempt to gain legitimacy and attract a wider range of supporters. It is clear from this chapter that this action specifically targets white women, the part of society with which men in the far right still seeks to oppress within their ideology. Traditionally, women have been relegated to a secondary position within these groups who seek to enhance traditional roles with men as dominant and woman as submissive. However, the radical right's subjugation of women has become a hindrance for much of the far right who now face new bigger enemies than just women, focusing on their racist and xenophobic ideologies. It is for this reason that women are now wanted, due to a focus on recruitment by the parties to build up their base of support. These false narratives of women in history are one of the means that they seek to carry out these aims.

## Notes

- 1 The policy of the far right in regard to women is explored extensively in Köttig, Michaela, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Petö. *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (New York: Springer, 2017). Within the text the secondary nature of women in terms of social hierarchy is discussed and in addition the limits placed upon women by the ideology of the far right because of perceived gender inferiority. For Köttig it is in these distinctions made in terms of gender bias that the policy of the far right, that of oppression of women, is realized.
- 2 Garland, Jon, and James Treadwell. 'No Surrender to the Taliban!' Football Hooliganism, Islamophobia and the Rise of the English Defence League. Paper presented at the Papers from the British Criminology Conference 2010. The symbols of Saint Leo and Saint George, respectively, are regularly seen in the organised mass demonstrations of far-right groups in their respective countries. The symbolism of past nationalistic and religious pride is linked with mass support, creating easily identifiable emblems.
- 3 David M. Herszenhorn, 'Marine Le Pen's National Front Rallies behind a New Name'. *Politico*, 2 June 2018.
- 4 Peter Davies, 'The Front National and Catholicism: From Intégrisme to Joan of Arc and Clovis'. *Religion Compass* 4, no. 9 (2010).
- 5 Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2013), 78.
- 6 Gerd Krumich. 'Joan of Arc between Right and Left'. In *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*, edited by Robert Tombs (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991), 49.
- 7 Ibid., 56.
- 8 Ingvald Raknem, *Joan of Arc in History, Legend and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- 9 Gerd Krumich, 'Joan of Arc between Right and Left'. In *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*, 44.
- 10 Peter Davies, *The National Front in France: Ideology, Discourse and Power* (London: Routledge, 2012), 112.
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- 16 Leonard Zeskind, *The 'Christian Identity' Movement: Analyzing Its Theological Rationalization for Racist and Anti-Semitic Violence*. Division of Church and Society of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1987.
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- 30 Op Cit. Kathleen M. Blee. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. 76.
- 31 Alma White, *The Ku Klux Klan in Prophecy* (Zarephath: Good Citizen, 1925).
- 32 Her memorial can be seen in the Bible college named after her in Zarephath New Jersey, which burned down in 1978, a memorial marker dedicated to her in Denver and the church that continues to bear her name also in Zarephath.
- 33 Carole C. Gallucci, Carole, 'She Loved Mussolini: Margherita Sarfatti and Italian Fascism'. In *Right Wing Women; from Conservatives to Extremists around the World*, edited by Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power (New York: Routledge, 2002): 19–29.

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*Figure 5.1* Spanish Republican *miliciana* on watch in the bell tower of a church in a village in the Aragón region. Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com.

## 5 The Wheel That Never Ceases

### Reinventions of the Spanish Second Republic for a New National Right (2004–2017)

*Iker Itoiz Ciáurriz*

On 12 March 2017, the front page of the conservative Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* read ‘The Fraud [*Pucherazo*]<sup>1</sup> of [19]36’.<sup>2</sup> Inside, readers were told that in their new book, *1936: Fraude y Violence* [*1936: Fraud and Violence*],<sup>3</sup> historians Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa García had ‘proven’ how the ‘leftists’ had manipulated the electoral results in 1936, giving the Popular Front a majority in the parliament. In fact, the idea that these elections were fraudulent has been a cliché of the Spanish right from that time onwards. Indeed, it was one of the Francoist justifications for the military coup in 1936 which threw the country into three years of civil war. For most of the democratic period (from 1975 onwards), most historians have rejected these claims. Only some pseudo-historians close to the far-right, such as Ricardo de la Cierva, Pío Moa, Federico Jiménez Losantos and César Vidal, supported it. In the days following the publication of this disproven ‘news’, much of the Spanish press publicised and defended the idea of the fraud of 1936.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, online media and professional historians dismissed the main arguments of the book, explaining why the thesis argued by Álvarez Tardío and Villa was untrue.<sup>5</sup> Yet, none of the aforementioned newspapers revised their positions. In their support of the thesis of fraud in 1936, many conservative newspapers gave legitimacy to these historians considered by most academic historians to be ‘revisionist’ in their renovation of the classic argument of the far right against the Spanish Second Republic and the social movements in favour of the historical memory of the Republic.

In Spain, much important scholarship has been produced since the 1980s to clarify aspects of the history of the Second Republic and the Civil War, including works by historians such as Ángel Viñas, Julio Aróstegui, Santos Julia, Paul Preston and others.<sup>6</sup> Within this broad consensus, some historians like Nigel Townson and Stanley G. Payne stood closer to the conservative thesis, and a characteristic idea of Francoism, that it was the Republic that caused the war. Payne suggested that the extremism of the Left during the Republic and the violence it employed in the elections of February 1936 rendered the vote unfair

and subsequently paved the way for the Francoist coup and the Civil War. Townson argued that the lack of consolidation of a centrist politics during the Second Republic, such as the Third Republic in France during the 1880s, caused the failure of the Republic due to the role of extremist positions. In this sense, Townson affirmed that the extremism of the socialists and ‘the limits to the socialists’ democratic credentials’ were fundamental factors.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, since the beginning of the 2000s, younger historians close to Payne and Townson have tried to recover and refurbish these arguments.<sup>8</sup>

By employing a new language of ‘neutrality’ and a strong defence of ‘liberalism’ and ‘Parliamentarism’—as if the Republic was opposed to these tendencies—‘revisionist’ historians such as Manuel Álvarez Tardío, Roberto Villa García, Fernando del Rey and Gabriele Ranzato have constructed new arguments for the national right. There are similarities with historiographical trends in countries such as France, Germany and Italy, through historians like François Furet, Ernst Nolte and Renzo de Felice. The origins of these revisionist tendencies in Europe can be traced in the ‘anti-totalitarian moment’<sup>9</sup> in France in 1977 to counter the *Union de la Gauche* coalition and the predominance of communists in the cultural world of post-1945 France. The principal aim of the revisionists was to eliminate the revolutionary tradition inaugurated in 1789 and subsequently deeply ingrained in the political culture of France.<sup>10</sup>

### The Origins of the Revisionist Turn

This revisionist turn in Spain began in 2007 with the rise of a new wave of social mobilisation demanding the approval of the Historical Memory Law in honour of the victims of Franco’s dictatorship. After the Spanish transition to democracy (1975–1982) the famous ‘Pact of Forgetting’ was forged, which was a political decision (by both the left and right parties) during the transition to avoid dealing with the legacy of Francoism after 1975. Putatively, the main reason was to put the past behind them and concentrate on the future of Spain. By forgetting the recent past, it would be possible to construct a united future shared by both ideological sides. A dominant idea in the transition was that peace and democracy were to be secured by acknowledging the ‘responsibilities and conciliation of every side’. There were some attempts to challenge this narrative in the 1980s and 1990s by victims of the Republican side, who argued for a historical memory that recognised the violence done to them. However, they only started to make inroads at the beginning of the 2000s. In 2004, the new socialist government created a commission to create a Historical Memory Law that was finally approved in 2007.<sup>11</sup> The law recognises the victims on both sides of the Spanish Civil War, gives rights to the victims and the descendants of victims of the Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship and

formally condemns the Franco regime. Notwithstanding, both sides of the ideological spectrum were unhappy with this law. From one side, the People's Party (PP) accused the socialist government of weakening the political consensus deriving from the transition to democracy, and of 'using the Civil War as an argument for political propaganda'. In turn, the left was unhappy that the law did not go far enough, either politically or financially. For instance, the law neither provided for the exhumation of the missing people from the Republican side buried in mass graves during the war and the dictatorship, nor for any funding for the people seeking to do so.<sup>12</sup>

Since the passing of the Historical Memory Law in 2007, the conservative PP launched a campaign against it, insisting that it merely opened up old wounds that had healed in the Spanish transition to democracy. For them, the so-called 'historical justice' claimed by the victims was simply a leftist manipulation and a mystification of the Second Republic that was, in reality, the cause of the division in Spanish society in the 1930s that led to the Civil War. In contrast, the Spanish transition was quite the opposite. These theses prefigured those launched by revisionist historians from 2008 onwards, using historical methods to delegitimise these movements. Their critics became more numerous in 2011, when the Indignados Movement emerged as an anti-austerity grassroots movement that challenged the political system born in 1978. Important sectors of this movement advocated historical justice for the victims of the Republican side in the form of a new historical memory law. These revisionists have emphasised two ideas: the flaws of the Republic, especially the myth that in April 1931 a selective republic was created; and, second, that the chaos of the elections of February 1936 opened the path for a military coup. Consequently, this invented past of a discriminatory republic that died principally because of the mistakes of the Left and not because of a military coup has found success in the aforementioned right-wing parties. In making these cases, these revisionist historians gave new weapons to the right-wing to delegitimise the Republic to counter the new social movements that from 2011 were seeking justice for the victims of the Civil War and the dictatorship.

My aim is to reflect on the rise and consolidation of this revisionist turn and how its theses have reinvented the history of the Second Spanish Republic to fit with the position held by the new right—the younger generations in the PP and the new liberal-conservative *Ciudadanos* [Citizens]—that deny any justice—either politically or financially—towards the victims of the Republican side and that openly opposed any narrative that defends the republican past. In this sense, both the revisionists and the right-wing parties speak about getting rid of the 'burden of history': the need to remember the past, which would mean to revise the historical cycle from 1931 to 1977 that would show the links between the Francoist elite and the current right-wing parties.

## The Rise of the Revisionism of the Second Spanish Republic (2007–2012)

In 2008, many books were published amid the polemics around the Historical Memory Law. Among them, Fernando del Rey's *Paisanos en lucha: exclusión política y violencia en la Segunda República española* [*Civilians in Struggle: Political Exclusion and Violence in the Second Spanish Republic*] studies the town of Solana in Ciudad Real, a province in Castilla-La Mancha. The book reflects on the violence in the Second Republic and in the Republic's supposed policies of exclusion and integration. Here, we already find the rhetoric of the revisionist historians:

The interest in the 1930s has not been exempt – either at the time or today – of controversies and ideological disputes unconnected with the interests of historians, at least those historians who reclaim knowledge of the past in itself at the same time that they support militant history.

In contrast, Del Rey announced his plan to 'develop the present research without recourse to emotional, heroic, idealist or mythical perspectives'.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, revisionist claims commonly contrast their own objectivity to the Left, which is supposedly unable to keep its ideological sympathies in check. Historian Ricardo Roble has affirmed how these revisionist historians constantly reiterate their objectivity but seldom demonstrate it.<sup>14</sup>

In 2010, Manuel Álvarez Tardío published 'Exclusion o integración: una alternativa trágica en la historia Española del siglo XX' ['Exclusion or integration: a tragic alternative in twentieth-century Spain'] in *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político*, a journal linked to FAES (Fundación para el Análisis y los Estudios Sociales [Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies]), a Spanish think tank of conservative-liberal ideology with strong links to the PP. In his article, Tardío argued the Second Republic was born from an exclusionary revolution, which failed to integrate parts of the political class in the church and military that were now disenfranchised in comparison with their place in the previous Restoration regime. For Álvarez Tardío, this was the root of the subsequent coup in 1936. Tardío argued, in contrast to the Spanish transition to democracy that was based on the cooperation and integration of all political adversaries, the Second Republic suffered from the outset from a lack of commitment to integration.

For Tardío, the different interpretations of the memory of the past in any given society are not only 'ideological interpretations of history' or 'as it were, party memories' that could affect the way Spanish society understood how the transition to democracy unfolded. Rather, he argues, '[I]t is not History with a Capital Letter, in other words, History

as science: knowledge of the past based on a rigorous and honest analysis of sources of contrasted value'.<sup>15</sup> He concluded that these interpretations only lead to 'feeding into the hallmarks of their producers and receivers. Which is to say, strengthening the feeling of belonging to an ideological community'. In his view, this attitude can be useful to

dispense with the complexity of the political history of a country when its history has been traumatic, as in the Spanish case. And, maybe it is worthwhile to appeal to Manicheism and to promote victimhood in order to win supporters to your cause.

However, Tardío explains, the foundation of a durable democracy in Spain required that 'these ideological accounts did not occupy too much space'.<sup>16</sup> In the same year, Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa published the book *El Precio de la Exclusión* [The Price of Exclusion]. Their aim was to

in a dispassionate way, look with the necessary distance for the facts that allow us to understand the context and to know the arguments of protagonists without getting trapped in their tensions or, as often happens, seduced by their arguments.<sup>17</sup>

Their hypothesis is that the deficit in legitimacy of the democratic Republic was the base of the problems that prevented the construction and consolidation of a pluralist democracy in 1930s Spain.<sup>18</sup> They argued that the fact that

the creators [of the Republic] identified democracy with a politics of public health that demanded the exclusion of the adversaries considered to be enemies, didn't mean that the Republic was condemned to break apart, and much less to end up in a Civil War. However, the block that came to power in the elections of February of 1936 [The Popular Front] could not disabuse those who had realised in the preceding years there were serious obstacles for a pacific alternative in power.<sup>19</sup>

We find the classic argument of the revisionist: the lack of democratic legitimacy of the Republic was one of the bases of its failure. First, while a variety of reasons are given, the focus is on the lack of interest in integrating the different political forces with the republicans and the left. It appears that the authors overlook just such an attempt to do so with the appointment of Niceto Alcalá-Zamora, a conservative monarchist from the Restoration, to be president of the Republic. Second, they affirmed that the events of 1931 did not inevitably lead to a civil war, but their condemnation of the democratic victory of the Popular Front suggests

otherwise. Third, no arguments are employed to explain how republican policies implied that opponents were considered enemies, unless the simple promotion of one's own democratic mandate already counts as such a confrontation.

The book goes on to make a comparison with the establishment of the Third Republic in France based on the François Furet's expression of 'the solidarity among moderates'.<sup>20</sup> While comparison as a method can be useful, it is not in this book. First, the historical context is totally different—the Third Republic in France was established in 1870s–1880s; the Second Spanish Republic, on the other hand, was born in the 1930s in the midst of huge economic crisis, the rise of fascism and a critical crisis of legitimacy of liberal ideology. Second, the consequences of the regimes preceding the Republic are completely overlooked—not only the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923–1930/31) but also the Restoration (1875–1923). While Tardío and Villa suggest that some monarchists helped to bring forth the Spanish Republic in the thirties, they affirm it was the left who took over the revolution that frustrated the consolidation of the regime. Third, the violence employed by the Republican forces, in particular the governmental authorities, made democratic consolidation impossible.

### **Consolidation and Advance: The Critical Years (2012–2018)**

In 2012, Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey edited a new edited volume, *The Spanish Second Republic Revisited*. Again, they focus their attacks on historical memory. 2012 was a complicated year across the Spanish political spectrum. The Indignados Movement, born in May 2011, rallied on the streets, challenging the foundations of the political regime born of the Spanish transition.<sup>21</sup> Historical memory of the victims was one of the political demands. Fernando del Rey and Álvarez Tardío argued 'the so-called "historical memory" movement prominent in Spain in the last few years has opened the door to the return of the "militant history" of different kinds'. From one side, one found the 'neo-Francoist' history that justified the dictatorship propaganda. On the other side, the history that

we could describe as *frentepopulista* or 'Popular-Frontist', dedicated to creating an idealized vision of a republic which, using an approach full of distortions, is identified without further consideration with left-wing republicanism and the forces of the working class (socialists, communists and anarchists), who – presented as a single body – supposedly threw themselves into a battle against the insurgents in its defence.

Thus:

Militant history, then, offers us an account of the past subordinated to very particular political interests, the common denominators of which, on the right and the left, are the questioning of the constitutional framework of Spain today, a challenging of the way in which the transition to democracy was undertaken after the dictatorship of General Franco, and the consequent mystification and/or distortion – with different slants on different sides – of the political experiences of the interwar period. Professional polemicists with methods that are deliberately alien to the rules of historical research, albeit with the support of some historians of different backgrounds, have been the leading figures in this phenomenon of ‘historical memory’.<sup>22</sup>

Against these polemicists: ‘the contributions that we have assembled in this book demonstrate that History, with a capital H, continues to claim an even larger space among Spanish and foreign researches, even when the challenges they face undoubtedly remain very difficult’.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it ‘is possible to analyse and write the history of the Republic in a way that is above all kinds of political polemics – past or present – and disconnected from myths, condemnations and self-interested manipulations’.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, one of the problems of the revisionists arises: their claims to be ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ are betrayed by the permeation of ideology throughout their writings. Historiographically speaking, to revise assumptions is not per se wrong, quite the contrary. However, the revisionist movement born in the seventies—inspired by Furet and Nolte’s works—based its arguments on present political trends rather than the historical moment they were studying. For instance, Del Rey and Tardío give the game away in the following pages:

over and above the diverse ideological and intellectual profiles of the historians who have contributed to this project, as editors we are fully convinced that all of us begin from a positive view of parliamentary democracy. Furthermore, we consider that guarantees of individual freedom and the protection of fundamental rights are not elements that we can regard as of relative or secondary value, in such a way that they can be seen as dispensable according to different historical contexts or the social and economic problems that might appear or disappear on the horizon.<sup>25</sup>

In the same way as François Furet or Ernest Nolte, each one claims to be a defender of liberal democracy against the ‘evil’ of totalitarianism (both fascism and communism). However, their approach hinges on monopolisation of legitimate interpretation. Their approach is similar to



Michael Freeden's notion of ideology as decontestation, whereby ideology functions not to promote one viewpoint against others, but rather to make that viewpoint seem natural, obvious, the only one imaginable.<sup>26</sup>

The thesis presented in the introduction is echoed throughout the book. For instance, Luis Arranz Notario suggests in his chapter that 'Liberalism establishes critical defences of an intellectual, moral and institutional nature against any possible deviation of democracy contrary to pluralism and towards statism'.<sup>27</sup> In Tardío's own chapter, the argument for an exclusivist republic is reiterated: 'Republican democracy began its journey in December 1931 with a serious, though not irreparable, deficit in terms of legitimacy'.<sup>28</sup>

Gabriele Ranzato's chapter goes on to refurbish some arguments defending Francoism. In his account, if October 1934 was perhaps not the beginning of the Civil War,

it certainly was its most important precondition and, to some extent, a dress rehearsal – and if we look at their actions [Francisco Largo Caballero<sup>29</sup> and his supporters] in the months that followed the victory of the Popular Front in February 1936.<sup>30</sup>

This is a classic Francoist argument: The origins of Civil War were set in the October events of 1934. The second argument involves blaming Manuel Azaña—president of the Republic since May 1936—for the outbreak of the Civil War:

In effect, what was contributing to leading the country toward the tragic outcome of civil war was the fact that Azaña not only could not openly reject the movement in Asturias [the events of October 1934], but was also unable to separate himself from those responsible for it, that is the Socialists as a whole, nor even their *Caballerista* wing, who were then attempting to carry out this revolution again in the whole Spain.<sup>31</sup>

He concluded:

Nothing is more destructive to the common sense of history, the perception of the movement of time, an awareness of the distance between past and present, than this continuous revival of old conflicts as if they were those of today. It would therefore be a grave error, professional and civil, if we historians also fell into this sin of lèse- history.<sup>32</sup>

This quote is unsurprisingly coming from Ranzato. In 2011, translated into Spanish in 2014, he published *El Gran Miedo de 1936* [The Great

Fear of 1936] where he implied writing for the 'Third Spain' which he situated in the middle moderate class:

By looking at the point of view of these people that integrated this social sector and looking at the way they contemplate the events, we could better understand how and why Spain sank into the abyss. Especially when that view of the 'true' third Spain coincides with the majority of the current citizens from democratic countries, sure - specially based on the past experiences- that to obtain social benefit and improvement from the social condition is through the pacific reforms of the liberal-capitalist system, instead of the destruction of the revolutionary way.<sup>33</sup>

In 2012, along similar lines, Fernando del Rey wrote an article which, once again, attacked the defenders of the Historical Memory Law. He situated himself in a 'third way' historiographical vision of the Republic—neither neo-Francoist nor Popular Frontist. While 'militant history has been resuscitated and has been so with the strength of hand of those who, with the support of memorialist fever, continue to see the 1930s and its protagonists either as an almost immaculate democratic experience'<sup>34</sup> opposed to those Popular Frontists who idealise the Republic, he is in the camp of

the historians who do not assume the heroic and binary vision of the 1930s, who appeal to complexity to understand a period that is difficult, confusing and contradictory like few others, with many dark spots when viewed from a democratic perspective.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, he was at pains to qualify what being in a different camp implied: 'Insofar as I have tried to explain the severity of the tensions, the sequences of exclusion and violence during the first half of 1936, this does not mean subscribing to Francoist or neo-Francoist theses'.<sup>36</sup> However, if he was, and is, arguing that the violence of the first half of 1936 contributed decisively to the Civil War, as the Francoist or neo-Francoist assumed, where are the third way interpretations of the Republic? Del Rey was trying, like Tardío and Ranzato, to justify his positions in terms of a new mode of interpretation. Nonetheless, as his works proved, his arguments are not different from those of many neo-Francoists. This defence of a 'centrist' politics in the thirties distorts the polarisation that was common in the interwar period and how Liberalism was discredited due to the actions made by the main supporters of Liberalism ideology in interwar Europe.<sup>37</sup> In their attempts to construct a sense of 'centrist' politics, based on a defence of liberal-capitalist system, where extremisms are bad, their arguments and conclusions re-brush classic

neo-Francoist theses where the Republic is the cause of the descent of the country to a civil war because of the violence and the ‘exclusionary’ vision of the republican leaders. From 2012, the biggest contribution to their revisionist arguments was the claim that the February elections of 1936 were fraudulent. Roberto Villa García first suggested this idea in 2011 in *La Republica en las Urnas* [The Republic in the Ballot Box], but he had not yet offered evidence. What he affirmed, similarly to Ranzato and Del Rey, was that the elections of 1933, and in particular the results, ‘represented the typical interwar elections (...) where it has already decisively separated from the classic liberalism’.<sup>38</sup> In 2017, the publication of *1936: Fraude y Violencia* with Manuel Álvarez Tardío legitimated this view. In the whole analysis—that, as mentioned earlier, has been proved wrong by academics—the 1936 elections and the subsequent Popular Front government were based on a fraudulent election. In their view, it was not only that some votes were modified to benefit the Popular Front but also that irregularities occurred in the days after the elections, which were held on 16 February. They point to the resignation of the president of the Government, Portela Valladeras and the rise as president of Manuel Azaña just four days after. They view this as a decision taken by the president of the Republic, Niceto Alcalá-Zamora based on the assumptions that the Popular Front had won the elections, even though the vote was not over. Therefore, Tardío and Villa dispute the democratic nature of the election, seeing it instead as an imposition of the president of the Republic. Nonetheless, Tardío and Villa forget that on the day after the elections, Francisco Franco—future dictator, at the moment Minister of War—tried to launch a ‘Legal Coup’ to avoid a Popular Front government.<sup>39</sup> This attempt forced the resignation of Portela and the decision of Niceto Alcalá-Zamora to give the government to Azaña and the Popular Front. Even if the vote was not over, it was clear that the Popular Front had won with a majority. In retrospect, Franco and his supporters argued that the fraud of this election precipitated their decision to launch a Coup against the Republic. Tardío and Villa, by augmenting the use of a ‘method’, ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’, reheat these arguments that, indeed, the Popular Front government was based on a fraudulent election.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

In recent years, these revisionists have continued publishing new works with the same hypothesis. Recently, in 2016—published in English in 2018—Manuel Álvarez Tardío published a biography of José María Gil Robles,<sup>41</sup> the leader of the Right-wing Party during the Republic, exonerating him of any involvement in the outbreak of the Civil War. In 2017, Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey published a new edited book called *Las Políticas del Odio*<sup>42</sup> [The Politics of Hate] where

they tried to link the Spanish case with the broader European scene in interwar Europe. Here again, their arguments do not differ from what has already been said.

In these pages, I have tried to show how these revisionists, by employing a language of neutrality and objectivity, have refreshed the arguments of the Francoists for the new right since 2008. Encouraged by the rise of mobilisation against the current political system in Spain and in favour of a new Historical Memory Law for the victims of the Republican side, they launched their research to weaken and dismiss the Republican side. Their case for their ‘centrist’, ‘moderate’ vision of politics, as defenders of a liberal democracy and pluralism, historians of a ‘third way’ against the two classical visions—the Popular Frontist and the (neo)Francoist—is unpersuasive. Ultimately, their arguments for the lack of legitimacy of the Republic on 14 April 1931, the burden of guilt of the left being higher than that of the right, the idea of the ‘extreme violence’ in the street before the Civil War or the fraudulent character of the 1936 election are all classic Francoist anti-republican tropes.

As historians, we ought to deconstruct this so-called revisionist approach, the aims of which are not historical research, but political support for (far) right-wing parties in the battles for political narratives of history. In this case, these revisionists have helped the right-wing PP and Citizens Party to dismiss, once more, the Second Republic and its victims from the Civil War and the dictatorship by using the same arguments of the Francoists, but this time supported by academic historians who have used their positions to legitimate these positions.

## Notes

- 1 *Pucherazo* is a Spanish Word that refers to the illegal Patrice practice: during the Restoration Period (1875–1923) where the election results were manipulated in order to benefit one of the candidates.
- 2 Javier Redondo, “El ‘pucherazo’ del 36”, *El Mundo*, 12 March 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831180534/http://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2017/03/12/58c3b8bb46163f9f338b457d.html>.
- 3 Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa, 1936. *Fraude y violencia en las elecciones del Frente Popular* (Barcelona: Espasa Libros 2017).
- 4 Some examples: Santos Julia, “Las cuentas galanas de 1936”, *El País*, 5 April 2017. Archived 21 August 2018. [https://web.archive.org/web/20180831181534/https://elpais.com/cultura/2017/03/30/babelia/1490893787\\_019343.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20180831181534/https://elpais.com/cultura/2017/03/30/babelia/1490893787_019343.html) and Peio H. Riaño, “Las Elecciones de 1936 ‘no fueron un pucherazo’, sino un ‘fraude localizado’”, *El Español*, 14 March 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831182008/https://www.elespanol.com/eemodules/BBFContentRelatedContentsESIMO/mo.html?p=eyJjb250ZW50SWQ4MDUyNn0&h=9143>.
- 5 Francisco Espinosa Maestre, “Receta antigua: ‘Fraude electoral 1936’ al horno”, *El diario*, 3 May 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831182400/https://www.eldiario.es/tribunaabierta/>

- Receta-antigua-Fraude-electoral-horno\_6\_639796034.html and José Luis Martín Ramos, “Las elecciones de 1936 y el Frente Popular: el triunfo de la democracia frente a las alternativas autoritarias”, *Público*, 8 May 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831182524/https://blogs.publico.es/dominiopublico/19753/las-elecciones-de-1936-y-el-frente-popular-el-triunfo-de-la-democracia-frente-a-las-alternativas-autoritarias/>.
- 6 See Eduardo González Calleja, Francisco Cobo Romero, Ana Martínez Rus and Francisco Sánchez Pérez, *La Segunda República Española* (Barcelona, Pasado and Presente, 2015).
  - 7 Stanley G. Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933–1936: Origins of the Civil War* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2006), 273–4 and Nigel Townson, *The Crisis of Democracy in Spain: Centrist Politics under the Second Republic, 1931–1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 354. Also, 349–59.
  - 8 Manuel Álvarez Tardío, *El camino a la democracia en España: 1931 y 1978* (Madrid: Gota a Gota, 2005), 221 and Gabriele Ranzato, *El eclipse de la democracia: la Guerra Civil Española y sus orígenes, 1931–1939* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006), XV.
  - 9 See Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004).
  - 10 Domenico Losurdo, *Le révisionnisme en histoire: problèmes et mythes*, trans. Jean-Michel Goux (Paris: A. Michel, 2005), 12.
  - 11 Carlos E. Cué, “La ley de Memoria Histórica se aprueba entre aplausos de invitados antifranquistas”, 1 November 2007. Archived 31 August 2018. [https://web.archive.org/web/20180831180909/https://elpais.com/diario/2007/11/01/espana/1193871618\\_850215.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20180831180909/https://elpais.com/diario/2007/11/01/espana/1193871618_850215.html).
  - 12 See Paloma Aguilar Fernández, *Políticas de la Memoria y Memorias de la Política. El caso español en perspectiva comparada* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2008).
  - 13 Fernando del Rey, *Paisanos en lucha: exclusión política y violencia en la Segunda República española* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008), 21–2.
  - 14 Ricardo Roble, “El giro ideológico en la histórica contemporánea española: ‘Tanto o más culpables fueron las izquierdas’” in *El Pasado en Construcción. Revisionismos históricos en la historiografía contemporánea*, Ed. Carlos Forcadell Álvarez, Ignacio Peiró and Mercedes Yusta Rodrigo (Zaragoza: Instituto Fernando el Católico, 2015), 303–38.
  - 15 Manuel Álvarez Tardío, “Exclusión o integración: una alternativa trágica en la historia española del siglo XX” in *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político*, No. 27 (July/September 2010), 81.
  - 16 Manuel Álvarez Tardío, “Exclusión”, 91.
  - 17 Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa, *El pecio de la exclusión. La política de la Segunda República* (Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2010), 21.
  - 18 Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa, *El pecio de la exclusión*, 8.
  - 19 Ibid., 11.
  - 20 Quoted in Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa, *El pecio de la exclusión*, 38.
  - 21 See: Emmanuel Rodríguez López, *La política en el ocaso de la clase media: el ciclo 15M-Podemos* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2016).
  - 22 Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey, “Introduction” in *The Spanish Second Republic Revisited. From Democratic Hopes to Civil War (1931–1936)* Ed. Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013). Trans. Nick Rider), 6–7.

- 23 Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey, "Introduction", 4.
- 24 Ibid., 7.
- 25 Ibid., 8.
- 26 Michael Freeden, *Ideology and Political Theory. A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- 27 Luis Arranz Notario, "Could the Second Republic Have Become a Democracy? in *The Spanish Second Republic Revisted. From Democratic Hopes to Civil War (1931–1936)* Ed. Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013) Trans. Nick Rider, 23–4.
- 28 Manuel Álvarez Tardío, "The CEDA: Threat or Opportunity? in *The Spanish Second Republic Revisted. From Democratic Hopes to Civil War (1931–1936)* Ed. Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013) Trans. Nick Rider, 68.
- 29 Francisco Largo Caballero (1869–1946) was a Spanish socialist leader closer to the most radical wing in the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and of the Workers' General Union (UGT) during this time.
- 30 Gabriele Ranzato, "The Republican Left and the Defence of Democracy, 1934–1936" in *The Spanish Second Republic Revisited. From Democratic Hopes to Civil War (1931–1936)* Ed. Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013) Trans. Nick Rider, 80.
- 31 Gabriele Ranzato, "The Republican Left", 94.
- 32 Ibid., 95.
- 33 Gabriele Ranzato, *El Gran Miedo de 1936. Como España se precipito en la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros. 2014) trans. Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale, 15.
- 34 Fernando del Rey Reguillo, "Revisionismos y anatemas. A vueltas con la II República" in *Historia Social*, Vol. 72 (2012), 160.
- 35 Fernando del Rey Reguillo, "Revisionismos y anatemas...", 162.
- 36 Ibid., 171.
- 37 See Mark Mazower, *Dark continent: Europe's Twentieth century* (London: Penguin, 1998).
- 38 Roberto Villa García, *La república en las urnas* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2011), 505.
- 39 As shown by Eduardo González Calleja in *En nombre de la autoridad: la defensa del orden público durante la Segunda República Española (1931–1936)* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2014).
- 40 Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa García, *Fraude*, 320.
- 41 Manuel Álvarez Tardío, *José María Gil Robles: Leader of the Catholic Right during the Spanish Second Republic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2018).
- 42 Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey (ed.), *Políticas del odio. Violencias y crisis en las democracias de entreguerras* (Madrid: Tecnos, 2017).

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*Figure 6.1* Crowds gathered at Glenn Beck's 'Restoring Honor' rally at the Lincoln Memorial on 28 August 2010 in Washington, DC. Photo by A.J. Bauer.

## 6 The Alternative Historiography of the Alt-Right

### Conservative Historical Subjectivity from the Tea Party to Trump

*A.J. Bauer*

America is at a crossroads and this is the point of choice. You must choose whether we wallow in our scars. Countries make mistakes — we have made more than our fair share — but it is what you do with those mistakes. We choose to wallow in them, or we choose to learn from our past and ask for redemption.

—Glenn Beck, 28 August 2010

Great historical changes are imminent when people are forced into a binary choice — fight or flee, join or die, resist or cuck. That is the position of white people, right now.

—Richard Spencer, 19 November 2016

Not long after Republican Donald J. Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton in the 2016 US presidential election, self-styled ‘white nationalist’ Richard Spencer was taking a victory lap of his own. As the national press searched for explanations for Trump’s unexpected win, Spencer—long an obscure figure toiling at the political fringe—became the poster boy of a new white supremacist movement, which Spencer termed the ‘Alt-Right’. Eschewing the cosplay aesthetics of traditional neo-Nazis, Spencer and his ilk repackaged old racist ideology to make it more palatable to a generation of white people shaped by broader trends towards racial colorblindness.<sup>1</sup> The press attributed these Alt-Right efforts as having provided the intellectual basis for Trump’s campaign rhetoric and policy proposals. His immigration demagoguery—from demanding a wall on the US/Mexico border, to advocating for a ‘total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the country’—was both firmly rooted in Alt-Right ideology, and created space for Alt-Right activists like Spencer to propagate their ideas more widely among the conservative grassroots. While early appraisals of Spencer and his Alt-Right forces have rightly fixated on their roots in Internet trolling culture,

their appropriation of long-standing white supremacist and neo-Nazi rhetoric and agendas, and their role in the election of President Donald J. Trump,<sup>2</sup> this chapter focuses on how Spencer and his ilk think of themselves as *historical* actors, with an eye towards how we, as historians, ought to consider their emergence in light of the historiography of the modern conservative movement in the United States.

Early profiles of Spencer focused on his boy-next-door demeanour, but his penchant for fascist flair was never far below the surface.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in late November 2016, Spencer made news for throwing a Nazi salute and shouting ‘Hail Trump!’ to punctuate his speech at the annual conference of the National Policy Institute, a white supremacist think tank that Spencer directs. Spencer’s anachronistic hand gesture has been the subject of intense scrutiny, but the speech that preceded the salute offers greater insight into the historical subjectivity of both Spencer and the Alt-Right. That is to say: Spencer was not merely engaging in a form of historical reenactment as he thrust his hand into the air, he was inviting his audience, comprised of 200-odd Alt-Right activists, to consider themselves as historical actors of a certain sort. Consider, for example, the words Spencer used to set up his salute:

As Europeans, we are uniquely at the center of history. We are, as Hegel recognized, the embodiment of world history itself. No one will honor us for losing gracefully. No one mourns the great crimes committed against us. For us, it is conquer or die. This is a unique burden for the white man, that our fate is entirely in our hands. And it is appropriate because within us, within the very blood in our veins, as children of the sun, lies the potential for greatness. That is the great struggle we are called to. We are not meant to live in shame and weakness and disgrace. We were not meant to beg for moral validation from some of the most despicable creatures to ever populate the planet. We were meant to overcome, overcome all of it. Because that is natural and normal for *us*! Because, for *us* as Europeans, it is only *normal* again when we are great again. Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!<sup>4</sup>

Here, Spencer not only advocates for the interests of white people in the United States, he does so in world historical terms. Name-dropping Hegel, Spencer draws on the German philosopher’s theories of historical progress, seemingly replacing Hegel’s *geist* with the white race and equating that race’s self-consciousness with historical subjectivity itself. Spencer’s concern with the necessary historical productivity of ‘binary choices’ nods to a sort of dialectical thinking that has typically, at least in the United States, been more common on the left than right. That speech was no outlier. Speaking to a gathering of about 75 young white nationalists on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in the summer of 2017,

nominally a ‘free speech’ rally, Spencer argued that the Alt-Right’s greatest enemy was neither Antifa nor Hillary Clinton, but rather the ‘end of history’. Spencer told his followers, borrowing liberally from the work of right-Hegelian Francis Fukuyama:

As the Cold War ended, liberalism and Americanism lost its enemy. It lost its boogeyman. And it began to feel that history was over. Now you could see that as some sort of ‘America, Fuck yeah!’ triumphalism. But that would be to misunderstand it. The end of history means the end of meaning. It means there is nothing else outside of consumer products, there’s nothing else outside of individualism.

Spencer continued:

Our greatest enemies will tell us there is nothing to fight for, that it’s all over. All you have to do is go to the voting booth or go purchase some cute new product or watch some cute new video. We are going to fight for meaning. We are going to start history all over again.<sup>5</sup>

According to Spencer, and his Alt-Right acolytes, recent history is best characterised by a declension narrative. In their telling, the once-proud white race, and the ‘Western Civilization’ it purportedly authored, has been losing world historical ground to consumer capitalism, liberal multiculturalism and egalitarian socio-cultural projects that have destabilised traditional race, gender and sexual hierarchies. The crisis of ‘meaning’ decried by Spencer is in fact a coming to terms with an always extant, if often repressed, social and cultural pluralism, and the proliferation of meanings that such pluralism entails. But to Spencer, whose idealised conception of ‘meaning’ is unitary and domineering, anything less than absolute white heteropatriarchal sovereignty is felt as ‘atomization, hopelessness and weakness’. Spencer’s gripe here is not only with leftist proponents of egalitarian social policy, it’s also with neoconservatives and neoliberal conservatives who he sees as colluding in the interest of a capitalist elite that lacks sufficient white racial consciousness. When Spencer says ‘We are going to start history all over again’, or indeed Trump says ‘Make America Great Again’, they are explicitly appealing to white conservatives who feel that history has left them behind. They are not merely calling for a renewal of white supremacist policies; they are calling for a return to white history.

Needless to say, Spencer’s is a supremely over-simple and heterodox interpretation of American history. Few mainstream scholars would dispute that white supremacy and the vexed racial and gendered legacies of Western Civilisation remain firmly entrenched in American politics and culture. Indeed, we need look no further than Donald Trump’s election in 2016. But Trump’s election also suggests that this interpretation of

history—however inaccurate our archives and current events reveal it to be—is nevertheless remarkably salient among an electorally significant segment of the general population. As this chapter will show, Spencer and Trump did not author the predominant historical subjectivity of contemporary conservatives. Its origins are clearly evident in the rhetoric and tactics of the Tea Party movement, which played a crucial role in priming the conservative grassroots to think of their political activism in world historical terms. Before turning to the origins of the particular historical subjectivities that animate the Alt-Right and Tea Party, respectively, it is worth briefly exploring how the dominant historiography of American conservatism fails to account for it.

### The ‘Rise’ of Modern Conservatism

Inspired in part by an influential 1994 *American Historical Review* essay by Alan Brinkley, in which he called American conservatism an ‘orphan in historical scholarship’, the past 20-plus years have seen the development of a robust sub-field specialising in the history of the modern conservative movement in the United States.<sup>6</sup> While conservatism is a complicated object of historical analysis—consisting of variegated, contingent and at times openly contradictory arrays of ideologies and social constituencies—the sub-field of scholars studying it has tacitly agreed on some basic parameters. As Kim Phillips-Fein noted in her 2011 *Journal of American History* state-of-the-field essay,

Generally, scholars of the Right have understood conservatism as a social and political movement that gained momentum during the post-World War II period. It began among a small number of committed activists and intellectuals, and ultimately managed to win a mass following and a great deal of influence over the Republican Party.<sup>7</sup>

Key, here, is the notion of ‘gaining momentum’. While the arguments of individual works may vary somewhat, the overall tendency of the sub-field is towards narrating American conservatism as a historically *ascendant* phenomenon. This tendency reflects the presentist imperatives that have long driven the boom in the history of conservatism literature. After all, Brinkley’s 1994 call to take conservatism seriously—as opposed to treating it as marginal feature of American political culture—occurred after the Reagan Revolution made it impossible to ignore the movement’s outsized influence. The sub-field flourished in the late 1990s and early aughts, just as conservatives finalised their capture of the Republican Party and, by 2000, all branches of the federal government—this conservative-dominant political climate influenced the questions historians have asked about the movement.

The sub-field's presentist framing of conservative history continues to this day. Take, for example, historian Rick Perlstein's confessional essay published in April 2017 in *New York Times Magazine* titled, 'I thought I understood the American Right. Trump proved me wrong'. Perlstein's trilogy of books chronicling the long rise of American conservatism from Goldwater to Nixon to Reagan has proven to be highly influential in cementing the dominant ascension narrative through which we have come to understand the movement's history. That narrative follows a dogged and relatively tight-knit group of activists, largely in the orbit of William F. Buckley's *National Review*, as they promoted a fusionist conservatism (using anti-communism to mix neoliberal economic theories with traditionalist ideologies concerning race, gender and religion) that ultimately commandeered the Republican Party. Perlstein sees in the election of Donald Trump a fundamental rupture from this historical narrative, which his books canonised.<sup>8</sup> Explaining the 'foundations for Trumpism', Perlstein contends, will require historians' increased attention to 'conservative history's political surrealists and intellectual embarrassments, its con artists and tribunes of white rage'.<sup>9</sup>

Foregrounding the conservative movement's efforts at respectability politics, historians have retroactively bestowed upon modern conservatism an undue sense of coherence, stability and propriety. As Phillips-Fein noted in her 2011 state-of-the-field, 'conflicts within the conservative movement have yet received relatively little attention from historians'.<sup>10</sup> The ideas, personalities and organisations jettisoned by the conservative movement in the interest of attaining respectability and national electoral success have been too often marginalised within academic historiography. This is not to say that historians have refrained from studying so-called 'fringe' groups like the John Birch Society, or more avowed white supremacist groups from Citizens Councils in the South, to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and White Power movement more nationally.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, scholars of racial conservatism have compellingly demonstrated the integral role of racial demagoguery and organising in the conservative movement's ultimate capture of the Republican Party.<sup>12</sup> But in emphasising party-based national electoral ascendancy while narrating the history of a diverse and tumultuous political movement, historians have tended to privilege the accounts of winners in internal movement conflicts, instead of carefully tracking the continuation of nominally failed projects, actors and ideas. That is to say, academic historians have played an unwitting role in reifying the tactical exclusions of modern conservative activists themselves.

## **Alt-Right Historiography**

Towards remedying this historiographical oversight, it is worth considering conservative history from the perspective of marginal movement

figures, or figures who have otherwise been on the losing end of internecine conflicts.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most central of these conflicts, at least judging by the concerns of the present, is the long-standing dispute between so-called ‘paleo-conservatives’, who emphasise Western chauvinism and nationalism, and neoconservatives, who emphasise laissez-faire economic policies and the imperialist promotion of neoliberal democracy abroad. In contemporary parlance, this feud loosely tracks the ongoing ‘nationalist vs. globalist’ conflict within the Trump administration. Among the paleo-conservatives (indeed, he coined the term) is none other than Richard Spencer’s mentor, the conservative intellectual historian Paul Gottfried.<sup>14</sup> In three books, as well as several essays and speeches, Gottfried articulates an alternative narrative to that of the academic historiography of the modern conservative movement—one told from simultaneously within and without that movement.

According to Gottfried’s interpretation, post-war American conservatism was initially rooted in mostly unacknowledged, ‘Hegelian assumptions about the dialectical nature of reality, the unique Western heritage of freedom, and the legitimacy of political power’.<sup>15</sup> These assumptions resulted in a ‘rejection of abstract universalism’, which Gottfried contends served as an intellectual common ground for the fusion conservatism promoted by the *National Review* in the 1950s and 1960s, and which he argues served as the principle basis for the movement’s virulent opposition to egalitarian policies (at home in the form of social welfare and desegregation; abroad in the form of the Soviet Union). The rise of the New Right in the 1970s, a moment which most academic historians (myself included) describe as a vital step towards Reagan’s electoral victory in 1980, is for Gottfried the beginning of the conservative movement’s decline.<sup>16</sup> According to Gottfried, the New Right’s investment in infrastructure—most notably think tanks like the Heritage Foundation—exhibited an ‘anti-theoretical bias’ that boosted neoconservative and neoliberal thinkers at the expense of paleo-conservatives like him. In Gottfried’s telling, the conservative movement’s increasing support for neoliberal imperialism and anti-nationalist free trade policies (from the 1980s until recently) is the result of a more fundamental dispute between ‘historical conservatives and antihistorical conservatives’.<sup>17</sup> The former, right-Hegelians like Gottfried who have been marginalised within the conservative movement see political struggle as historically contingent. The latter, neoconservatives and neo-liberal conservatives, subscribe to a ‘theologically or metaphysically based’ conception of political struggle.

Where the latter framed politics as an eternal struggle between good and evil (or liberty and tyranny), with America as a divinely inspired attempt at implementing such abstract and historically transcendent Enlightenment principles as liberty and human rights, Gottfried and his right-Hegelians view the American project as rooted in the successful historical synthesis of Enlightenment values with earlier more

hierarchical values, promoted by a 'Western Civilization' that overlaps considerably with modern conceptions of the white race. In Gottfried's telling, then, the conservative movement's emphasis on promoting the abstract universalist values of neoliberalism at home and abroad has resulted in its forfeiture of the particular hierarchical values of Western Civilisation. For Gottfried, this is not merely a policy dispute but a rejection of history itself.

While Gottfried's framing of the conservative movement's primary internal conflict is reductive and self-serving, his focus on the duelling historical subjectivities contained within modern conservatism is nevertheless interesting. If, as Gottfried suggests, modern conservatism can be partly characterised as a struggle between historical and ahistorical political subjectivities (and the divergent policy proposals resultant therefrom), the emergence of the Tea Party movement would seem to be just the sort of synthesis a right-Hegelian like Gottfried could appreciate. From its outset in 2009 scholars have noted the Tea Party's curious mixture of abstract idealism and historicity. Historian Jill Lepore has productively framed the Tea Party's historical subjectivity as paradoxical, characterised by both 'antihistorical' and 'historical fundamentalist' tendencies.<sup>18</sup> There are stark ideological differences between the Tea Party and Alt-Right, no doubt. The former includes a staunch defence of free market capitalism, of which the latter is quite critical. The former is nominally ambivalent about whiteness, hewing to more colorblind modes of racial politics, while the latter is avowedly white supremacist.<sup>19</sup> But if we consider the two movements for their historical claims, unforeseen continuities come into focus. By unpacking the Tea Party movement's historical subjectivity, we begin to see the conditions of possibility for Alt-Right appropriation. Indeed, the historical subjectivity fostered by the Tea Party movement primed the conservative grassroots to readily assent to that of the Alt-Right.

### **Theorising Tea Party Historical Subjectivity**

In *The Whites of Their Eyes*, Jill Lepore juxtaposes her first-hand experiences attending gatherings of the Greater Boston Tea Party in 2009 with detailed accounts of daily life in the eighteenth century, amidst the tumult of displacement, slavery and revolution no less. In doing so, she 'measures the distance' between the two eras through subtly revealing the stark differences, down to quotidian detail, between them.<sup>20</sup> This desire to correct the Tea Party's over-simple version of American history by providing relevant context, thereby revealing the shallow historical resonance of the movement's rhetoric, is certainly laudable. But her use of a distance metaphor to describe her work begs an unpacking of the diagnosis that suggests *measurement* as its cure. Lepore correctly identifies the Tea Party movement as engaging in a peculiar form of historical



‘reenactment’, and her discussion of the use of Founding Fathers rhetoric during the 1970s astutely demonstrates that the contemporary movement is by no means the first to engage in such reenactment. However, she argues that the Tea Party movement has taken an additional step: ‘the statement at the core of the far right’s version of American history went just a bit further. It was more literal than an analogy. It wasn’t “our struggle is like theirs”. It was “we are there” or “they are here”’. Most odious to Lepore as a professional historian, and importantly in light of her concern with distance, is the Tea Party movement’s apparent defiance of ‘chronology, the logic of time’—‘time moves forward, not backward’, she writes, ‘Chronology is like gravity. Nothing falls up’.<sup>21</sup>

Lepore’s critique of the Tea Party conception of historical time doubles as a defence of chronology in general, but also of an implicitly linear time (which moves in only one direction, forward). And who could blame her? Linear time is a hallmark of modern historiography—indeed, the linear graphical representation of time dates back to the late eighteenth century, fittingly, the very period Lepore studies and whose history she sets out to defend.<sup>22</sup> But such a critique fails to differentiate between ‘time’ and ‘history’—a slight of hand common in what Walter Benjamin called ‘historicism’. Historicism, Benjamin wrote in his theses on history, results in a ‘Universal history [which] has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time’. Of course, Benjamin advocates for historical materialism, which, while also primarily linear, allows for the existence of ‘Messianic time’, referring to a non-linear connectivity between present and past.<sup>23</sup> Benjamin’s positing of historical materialism suggests that linear chronology is not *the* logic of time, but merely *a* logic of time—and apparently a logic of time that does not fully resonate with members of the Tea Party movement.<sup>24</sup>

Lepore’s historicist critique of the Tea Party’s approach to history centres on the movement’s putative sense of historical simultaneity, especially with those of the nation’s Founding period. However, in-depth interviews with Tea Partiers—including some Lepore herself no doubt rubbed elbows with in Boston—reveal a far more complicated notion of historical connectivity. Perhaps wary from constant media caricature by the summer of 2010, some of my Tea Party informants downplayed the importance of Founding Fathers tropes in the movement.<sup>25</sup> For example, Greater Boston Tea Party steering-committee members Peter Laird and Christine Morabito were each reluctant to compare the contemporary movement to the eighteenth century. When asked about the movement’s relationship to the colonial period, Laird suggested that the connection was mostly in name only. ‘I think it’s clever’, Laird said, referring to the ‘Tea Party’ name.

I think it’s clever because it gives you a tie back to the Founding Fathers — and one of the things that I was struck with, the first

meetings that I went to, was how many people made reference to the Constitution and how they thought Washington [D.C.] was just running roughshod over the Constitution.<sup>26</sup>

Morabito had a similar response. Asked why she supposed the Tea Party movement attempted to draw connections to the Founding period, Morabito said, 'I guess it's the bravery of those men and knowing what they had to lose... I mean, so anything that I do pales in comparison'.<sup>27</sup> While neither Laird nor Morabito seemed literally to believe that 'American history has been repeated', both still saw themselves as heirs to a long struggle against overbearing government, a struggle they believed to be shared by the Founding Fathers and enshrined in the US Constitution.<sup>28</sup>

As the responses of Laird and Morabito show, while Tea Partiers did generally see themselves as engaged in the same meta-historical struggle of the Founding Fathers, they also acknowledge and embrace the exceptionality of the present moment. Furthermore, media and scholarly emphasis on Tea Party historical connectivity to the eighteenth century overlooks the movement's indebtedness to the historical logic of the Cold War, during which most Tea Partiers were born and raised.<sup>29</sup> In what became a recurring theme over the course of my fieldwork and interviews, most Tea Partiers do not view progressivism as *the same as* monarchy, but rather see the former as a slow march to the totalitarianism they equate with monarchy—less akin to King George than to *The Road to Serfdom*.<sup>30</sup> It is, thus, through the logic of moral and political equivalence that Tea Partiers achieve a sense of historical simultaneity and come to view themselves as coeval not only with the Founding Fathers but also with Cold Warriors.

### **'The future is in the re-founding'**

Perhaps no figure played a more central role in fostering the Tea Party movement's historical subjectivity than did then-Fox News host and current conservative Internet media mogul Glenn Beck. On 28 August 2010—the 47th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom—Beck staged a massive historical reenactment he called 'Restoring Honor', where thousands of supporters recreated the iconic protest, as if substituting their own New Right prose over a Civil Rights palimpsest. While not formally sanctioned by the Tea Party movement, Beck choreographed the rally to highlight the values held by many of its more socially conservative members. Indeed, during the spring and summer months of 2010 Beck had assumed a role as the movement's unofficial historian, achieving a ratings bonanza for his Fox News show by hosting a weekly series of historical programs known as 'Founders' Fridays'.<sup>31</sup> He began the series with hagiographic profiles of such Tea Party-beloved figures as Samuel Adams and George Washington, but quickly turned to a provocative re-narration of the history of race and racism in the United

States. Lamenting the erasure of free and freed African Americans in popular depictions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century US history, Beck devoted several highly rated episodes to extolling forgotten black heroes (mostly soldiers, entrepreneurs and ministers) and highlighting the racism of white progressives in the early twentieth century. Viewers learned, for example, that freedman Peter Salem had fought valiantly on behalf of the Continental Army at Bunker Hill. They were treated to a biography of Frederick Douglass that emphasised his ascension from slave to presidential adviser. They learned of President Woodrow Wilson's racism and extension of Jim Crow segregation in federal agencies and policy. The sum of Beck's narrative was that a long history of black heroics and empowerment was stifled and erased by the racism of the progressive movement. By the time Beck stood in King's footsteps at the base of the Lincoln Memorial, his audience was primed to view Beck's conservatism as historically aligned with King against the racist legacies of progressive social policy.

After hours of rallying around the troops, rallying around the flag and rallying around God, 'Restoring Honor' culminated with Beck's much-anticipated keynote address—one in which, arguing in favour of 'faith, hope and charity', Beck clearly articulated the Tea Party movement's conception of 'American exceptionalism', which doubles as its conception of history itself. Surrounded as much by monuments to the past as by the people of the present, Beck traced a particular version of American history, one that emphasised the individual contributions of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and King. But Beck's was a historical argument for ahistoricism. As the speech drew to an end, Beck finally proclaimed what he had been suggesting throughout:

America is at a crossroads and this is the point of choice. You must choose whether we wallow in our scars. Countries make mistakes — we have made more than our fair share — but it is what you do with those mistakes. We choose to wallow in them, or we choose to learn from our past and ask for redemption.

At that point, his emotions on the verge of overtaking him, Beck stumbled over his words and stopped to dab his teary eyes. His composure regained, Beck continued, 'It matters not where we are right now, it matters not where we have been, it's what we're doing today that makes a difference'.<sup>32</sup>

What they were doing that day, what Beck called 'Restoring Honor', was by no means limited to that day or that iconic place—throughout the summer of 2010 similar, albeit smaller spectacular reenactments were taking place in communities across the United States.<sup>33</sup> For his part, Andrew Breitbart chose Independence Hall in Philadelphia for his backdrop, staging a 'UNI-TEA rally' aimed at erasing the Tea Party's

reputation for racism.<sup>34</sup> 'If this country does not recognize that the future is in the re-founding of this country based on its original principles then we will fail', Breitbart intoned.<sup>35</sup> As Beck's and Breitbart's 2010 keynotes reveal, the Tea Party movement not only made a conservative political claim, it did so through encouraging a common mode of feeling historical. Tea Partiers revered history because their political claim depended upon it—the movement's producer nationalist appeal sought to circumvent the Obama administration's claim to represent 'the people', staging a countersubversive claim on behalf of the sovereignty of a *particular* people, whose legitimacy is derived from the past, as opposed to the present.<sup>36</sup>

However, as Beck's speech shows, the historical argument needed to support such a claim requires some fancy footwork, a two-step of worship and disavowal. Beck's dichotomy, that Americans can either focus on the nation's 'scars' or on building its future, implies a two-pronged historical approach—'good' history, that is to say the inspirational stories often memorialised in monuments, is eternal, occurring in the past but also transcendent, occupying the present and determining the future as, to use Beck's term, 'American scripture'; meanwhile 'bad' history, including 'mistakes' such as slavery and discrimination, is rendered static, calcified into discrete 'scars' that require no more treatment and, thus, can be forgiven and forgotten. If we take Beck at his word that his goal was antiracist, that he sought to redeem the souls of white folks so that they could lead the way into the post-racial future, then a funny thing happened along Beck's arch of History. By universalising black suffering and protest, thereby rendering it palatable to and performable by white conservatives, he unwittingly set the historical stage for the overtly white supremacist politics he putatively sought to overcome. Indeed, two months after Donald Trump descended the golden escalator to announce his presidential candidacy using the rhetorical tools of the Alt-Right, Beck was in Birmingham and back on his bullshit.

### **'Never again is now'**

On the morning of 29 August 2015, arms linked with black pastor Jim Lowe and former Woolworth lunch counter protestor Clarence Henderson, Beck led a 20,000-person march from Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church to a local arena for a rally aimed at 'Restoring Unity'. In September 1963, the church had been the site of an infamous KKK bombing, which took the lives of four black girls, and subsequently served as a catalytic event of the Civil Rights campaigns of the 1960s. Some 52-years later, in the face of a resurgent black freedom struggle revitalising in opposition to police brutality under the hashtag and rallying cry Black Lives Matter, Beck and his overwhelmingly white followers marched under a blimp adorned with a banner reading '#ALL LIVES

MATTER' (a slogan which had gained purchase among proponents of racial colorblindness and opponents of structural analyses of racism) all while carrying posters of Frederick Douglas and Abraham Lincoln labelled with the words 'Courage' and 'Justice', respectively.

In addition to chanting 'All Lives Matter', the crowd also chanted 'Never Again Is Now', a quintessentially Beckian aphorism meant to historically link the persecution of Coptic Christians by the Islamic State to the Nazi holocaust of Jews and other perceived subversives. 'After the second world war we as a people promised "Never Again"', Beck said in his announcement of the August march, 'May I suggest that Never again is NOW'.<sup>37</sup> What, one might reasonably ask, does the white supremacist murder of black girls in an Alabama church in 1963 have in common with the murder of Coptic Christians in Syria by the Islamic State in 2015? Further, how is it possible for thousands of middle-aged white Americans to recognise themselves in both sets of victims, so much so as to provoke them to take to the streets of Birmingham in protest? Such is the nimble power of the Tea Party historical subjectivity to universalise and appropriate human suffering, and to lay historical claim to movements that their antecedents, indeed quite likely many of their parents, once attempted to brutally suppress.

As is common in Beck productions, he and his followers' call for 'unity' was more ironic than they likely realised. Perhaps the most famous historical precedent for white Christians calling for the restoration of 'unity' in Birmingham was a Good Friday statement released by eight white clergymen, published in the local papers on 12 April 1963. That letter, known as 'A Call for Unity', labelled Dr Martin Luther King, Jr and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference as outside agitators, opposed civil disobedience and culminated with the plea: 'We further strongly urge our own negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations, and to unite locally in working peacefully for a better Birmingham'.<sup>38</sup> By 2015, however, it was the *opponents* of the black freedom struggle who were the outside agitators in Birmingham, at least judging by the demographics of Beck's march. Even according to a friendly news source, approximately 90% of the marchers were white (this in a city where 73% of the population identified as black or African American in the 2010 census) leading one of the march's few black attendees to lament to a reporter for the *New Yorker* magazine, 'I wish there were more black people here'.<sup>39</sup> This lack of diversity, and thematic resonance (despite tactical dissonance) with outspoken opponents of the Civil Rights movement, did not stop Beck from framing his march as belonging to the same 'arc of History' conceptualised by Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. Beck explicitly acknowledged his indebtedness to King in his call to march, and even invited King's niece, conservative activist Alveda King, to march alongside him in the leading line.

Birmingham was a rejoinder of sorts to Beck's more famous attempt to place himself in King's shoes back in 2010. Both rallies involved thousands of white people reenacting iconic scenes from the black freedom struggle of the 1960s; both occurred at the end of summers whose news cycles foregrounded simmering racial tensions within the United States; both involved Beck figuratively embodying the King legacy for his own political ends. More importantly, both involved obscuring the racial particularity of the black freedom struggle, while romanticising its actions, with the aim of transforming a struggle for the defence of black lives into something more relatable to white conservatives. While Beck refrained from appealing directly to white racial consciousness, instead rooting his historical moral equivalence in the win-win colorblind language of 'all lives', Richard Spencer and his Alt-Right sought to reframe racial struggle in more zero-sum terms. If the Tea Party and Beck helped white conservatives identify with the historical struggle for racial justice, Spencer and the Alt-Right seek to re-particularise that struggle in the service of white racial consciousness.

### **'Make America Great Again'**

To conclude, I'd like to briefly return to Richard Spencer. In his 'End of History' speech, discussed at this chapter's outset, Spencer broached the topic of the Magna Carta. Rejecting the Whig historical interpretation of the document as declaring the universal rights of citizens, Spencer instead argued that the document was the expression of 'rebellious barons who, through unity, achieved power and took their rights from King John'. Spencer continued,

In this way, our right to speak is intrinsically linked with our ability to be powerful. With our ability to stand for ourselves, and not stand for others. No free speech is ever guaranteed by a deity. Free speech is guaranteed by our willingness to be powerful and our willingness to stand strong.

Spencer's articulation of rights with a particular group's ability to seize and maintain power, with all its authoritarian political implications, is rooted in his right-Hegelian historical subjectivity—his belief in historical contingency and the dialectical struggle to achieve a white supremacist historical agency. As this chapter has shown, that view of history articulates easily with the more popular forms of historical subjectivity nurtured during the Obama administration by the Tea Party movement and Glenn Beck. The Trump slogan 'Make America Great Again' perfectly straddles these two historical subjectivities, further illuminating both their proximity and distinction. For Tea Partiers, à la Beck, making

America great *again* means achieving the ideal that never was—a ‘return’ to what was great about America when the white heteropatriarchy ruled unchallenged, having safely forgiven and forgotten, but by no means remedied, the particular racial and gendered hierarchies that underwrote those ‘great’ times. For the Alt-Right, too, making America great *again* involves a return to white heteropatriarchal rule, but this time with no regrets. I highlight this by way of saying: as historians of the present, we must not only be attendant to which narratives are usable (or open to appropriation) by far-right groups, but must also account for how the sense of being a historical actor shapes different and competing right-wing political mobilisations in the United States, as well as the historical conditions necessary to embolden such historical subjects.

## Notes

- 1 For a helpful exegesis on racial formation in the United States, and the rise of colorblind racial ideology, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd edition (New York: Routledge, 2015).
- 2 See Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2017) and Matthew N. Lyons, *CTRL-ALT-DELETE: The Origins and Ideology of the Alternative Right* (Cambridge, MA: Political Research Associates, 2017).
- 3 John Woodrow Cox, “Let’s Party like It’s 1933”: Inside the Alt-Right World of Richard Spencer’, *The Washington Post*, 22 November 2016.
- 4 Transcribed, with original emphasis, by author. See Red Ice TV, ‘Richard Spencer – NPI 2016, Full Speech’, *YouTube*, 21 November 2016. Archived 30 December 2018. <https://web.archive.org/watch?v=Xq-LnO2DOGE>.
- 5 Richard Spencer, ‘End of History’, 25 June 2017. Archived 30 December 2018. <https://web.archive.org/watch?v=wFn2B00Pka4>.
- 6 Alan Brinkley, ‘The Problem of American Conservatism’, *American Historical Review* (April 1994), 409–29.
- 7 Kim Phillips-Fein, ‘Conservatism: A State of the Field’, *The Journal of American History* (December 2011), 727.
- 8 See Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001); *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).
- 9 Rick Perlstein, ‘I Thought I Understood the American Right. Trump Proved Me Wrong’, *New York Times Magazine*, 11 April 2017.
- 10 Phillips-Fein, 741.
- 11 For superlative works examining the John Birch Society, Citizens Councils, the Ku Klux Klan and the White Power movement, see, respectively, D.J. Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society: Conspiracy, Conservatism and the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014); Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017);

- Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).
- 12 See especially Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- 13 Geoffrey Kabaservice, a historian of modern conservatism with moderate Republican sympathies, employs a similar approach in *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party from Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 14 Jacob Siegel, 'The Alt-Right's Jewish Godfather', *Tablet*, 29 November 2016. Archived 30 December 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181230232642/https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/218712/spencer-gottfried-alt-right>.
- 15 Paul Edward Gottfried, *The Search for Historical Meaning: Hegel and the Postwar American Right* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986).
- 16 It is worth noting that moderate Republicans, like historian Geoffrey Kabaservice, also see the rise of the New Right as contributing to a decline in their preferred iteration of conservative activism and thought. Modern conservative hegemony, thus, involved displacement not only of 'moderate' Republicans, from Nelson Rockefeller to George Romney, but also more radical conservative thinkers like Gottfried.
- 17 *Ibid.*, xiv, xv.
- 18 Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 15–16.
- 19 For a thorough study of the variegated yet consistent political beliefs of Tea Partiers, see Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For a helpful explication of the Tea Party movement's colorblind racial politics, see Meghan A. Burke, *Race, Gender, and Class in the Tea Party: What the Movement Reflects about Mainstream Ideologies* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015).
- 20 Lepore, *Whites of their Eyes*, 19.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 7; 15–16.
- 22 See Daniel Rosenberg, 'Joseph Priestley and the Graphic Invention of Modern Time', in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, vol. 36 (2007), 55–103.
- 23 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007 [1950]), 262–3. Benjamin describes the role of the historical materialist as, 'grasp[ing] the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time'.
- 24 Lest it seem that I am taking Lepore more literally than she takes herself, she further describes her method thusly: 'It measures that distance by taking soundings in the ocean of time. Here, now, we float on a surface of yesterdays. Below swirls the blue-green of childhood. Deeper still is the obscurity of long ago. But the eighteenth century, oh, the eighteenth century lies fathoms down'. (19).

'Floating on the surface of yesterdays' sounds a lot like the additive historical approach, and if the eighteenth century is 'fathoms down' it is quite



- literally buried, implicitly beyond the conceptual grasp of lay activists, untrained in the nuances of eighteenth-century historiography.
- 25 The findings reported here stem from two months of participant observation by the author of the Tea Party movement in the summer of 2010, including 23 formal interviews conducted with participants in Texas and Massachusetts and dozens of more informal conversations along the way.
  - 26 Peter Laird, in conversation with author, 14 June 2010, Boston, Massachusetts.
  - 27 Christine Morabito, in conversation with author, 17 June 2010, Medford, Massachusetts.
  - 28 To quote a leaflet I received at a North Texas Tea Party Constitutional Education Class, McKinney, Texas, 17 July 2010.
  - 29 According to a 2010 'New York Times/CBS News Poll of Tea Party Supporters', some 74% of Tea Partiers were born in 1965 or earlier. Only 7% reported being born after 1980. See Kate Zernike, *Boiling Mad: Inside Tea Party America* (New York: Times Books, 2010), 226.
  - 30 Notably, three of my informants reported Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* as among their favourite books and five listed Hayek among their favourite authors. Hayek's name was also broached repeatedly at Tea Party events.
  - 31 The topics of Beck's 'Founders' Fridays' episodes were common fodder for conversation at the many Tea Party events I attended in the summer of 2010, and his May 28 episode, which specifically highlighted the contributions of 'black founders', a group of free and freed African Americans who proved instrumental in the revolutionary war and early struggles against slavery, earned Beck a top rating among cable news shows. Archived 30 December 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181230232900/https://www.mediaite.com/tv/glenn-becks-african-american-founders-special-1-on-cable-news-friday/>.
  - 32 For full video of Beck's keynote, see Archived 30 December 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181230233219/https://www.glennbeck.com/content/articles/article/198/45013/>.
  - 33 For my part, I witnessed 23 such events during my field research in the summer of 2010, including meetings and rallies in Massachusetts, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC.
  - 34 A regular speaker on the Tea Party rally circuit, conservative commentator Andrew Breitbart was the founder and namesake of *Breitbart.com*. After Breitbart's untimely death in 2012, Steve Bannon helped steer the site in a more paleo-conservative direction—the site thus played a crucial role in championing both the Tea Party and the Alt-Right.
  - 35 Speech transcribed from audio recording by author. Andrew Breitbart, addressing UNI-TEA rally, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 31 July 2010.
  - 36 For a helpful accounting of the mutual roles of 'producerism' and 'nationalism' in the formation of right-wing populist movements, see Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), 6. See also, 348–50.
  - 37 Glenn Beck, "Never Again Is Now": Glenn announces relief campaign for Middle East, 'Restoring Honor' anniversary event in Birmingham, and much more', 8 June 2015. Archived 30 December 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181230233333/https://www.glennbeck.com/2015/06/08/never-again-is-now-glenn-announces-relief-campaign-for-middle-east-restoring-honor-anniversary-event-in-birmingham-and-much-more/>. Emphasis in original.
  - 38 The Good Friday statement famously served as an inspiration for King's 'A Letter from Birmingham Jail'. See S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed Are the*

*Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

- 39 Lee Stranahan, 'Glenn Beck Draws 20,000 to Unity Rally and Media Ignores', *Brietbart.com*, 1 September 2015. Archived 30 December 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181230233509/https://www.breitbart.com/the-media/2015/09/01/glenn-beck-draws-20000-to-unity-rally-and-media-ignores/>; Brian Barrett, 'A Day Inside Glenn Beck's America', *The New Yorker*, 1 September 2015. Archived 30 December 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181230233615/https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-day-inside-glenn-becks-america>.



*Figure 7.1* Alexander Dugin at a press conference in Bucharest on 5 April 2017. LCV/Shutterstock.com.

## 7 The Extremist Construction of Identity in the Historical Narratives of Alexander Dugin's *Fourth Political Theory*

Charles Robert Sullivan and  
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This essay examines how the contemporary Russian public intellectual Alexander Dugin's interpretations of history in *The Fourth Political Theory* promote an Alt-Right agenda. Initially published in 2009, *The Fourth Political Theory* plays off of the contemporary global economic crisis.<sup>1</sup> This crisis, Dugin claims, reflects 'the logic of world history'. 'Moving from ... one [financial] bubble to the next, the globalist economy and ... post-industrial society', he writes, 'only make mankind's night blacker' (4PT, 30–1; ChPt, 26–7). Technical reforms or public relations campaigns offer no real relief. Only engaging the 'philosophical foundations of history' provides an adequate response. It is this task that Dugin undertakes in *The Fourth Political Theory*.

The urgency with which Dugin pursues the philosophical foundations of history derives not only from contemporary economic instability; it derives especially from contemporary Russian history. Alexander Dugin was born in 1962 in Moscow to relative privilege—some accounts make his (absentee) father a Colonel-General in Soviet military intelligence.<sup>2</sup> His formative experiences corresponded, therefore, to the economic and political sclerosis of the Brezhnev years, the disorienting reforms of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, the rapid dissolution of the Soviet Union and the troubled years of the Yeltsin Presidency—to, in short, the late Soviet paradox that Alexei Yurchak neatly summed up as 'Everything was forever, until it was no more'. Dugin's intellectual development has been a continuous struggle to find a historical narrative with which he could make sense of these tumultuous events.

From the late 1970s to the 1990s, Dugin carried on this struggle through rapidly shifting affiliations in various extremist groupuscules that led from the esoteric Yuzhinsky circle to the anti-Semitic *Pamyat* (Memory) movement and finally to Eduard Limonov's 'red-brown' alliance of communist economics and fascist politics, the National Bolshevik Party (NBP). With Yeltsin's appointment of the anti-Western Yevgeny Primakov as prime minister in 1998, Dugin sensed an opportunity to adopt

a more mainstream public image. He left the NBP and completed his education, earning a graduate degree in philosophy at North-Caucasian Higher School in 2000 and a doctorate from the Ministry of Interior Juridical Center in Rostov-on-Don in 2004. Thanks to military contacts, Dugin had begun to lecture at the Academy of the General Staff and from 1998 to 2003, Dugin served—on the strength of the publication of his *Fundamentals of Geopolitics* (1997)—as chairman of the Duma's Advisory Council on National Security.

With the election of Vladimir Putin in March 2000, Dugin moved to secure connections with both the new presidential administration and leading figures in the United Russia political party. In 2008, Dugin became director of the Center for Conservative Research at the Sociological Faculty of Moscow State University and from 2009 to 2014 he was head of the Department of the Sociology of International Relations at Moscow State University. An important aspect of Dugin's formidable promotional skills is his deployment of contemporary media. Dugin appears frequently on Russian television, and around him cluster a dense array of affiliated institutes and associated websites. Alongside these activities, the tireless Dugin has published as many as 50 books. In this chapter, we look at *The Fourth Political Theory* because for Dugin it is the centrepiece of his mature thought, the first of his books to be well translated into English, and most importantly because it is his 'calling card' with various Alt-Right movements.<sup>3</sup>

Accompanying Dugin's increasing prominence has been a growing scholarship of ever greater sophistication. Much of this scholarship emphasises intellectual history, either explicating Dugin's sources or locating his ideas in the unsettled intellectual field of post-Soviet Russia. Our reading of *The Fourth Political Theory* adheres to Dugin's own outline (4PT, 12–3; ChPT, 6–7) and discriminates three levels in the book's historical arguments—a survey of the political history of modernity, an account of the battle for postmodernity and a project for 'another beginning' that draws from German philosopher Martin Heidegger and that posits a new order as an alternative to what both Heidegger and Dugin see as the contemporary West's 'End' time. We are deeply indebted to intellectual historical scholarship, but our emphasis will be on the social history of ideas and the social psychology of radicalisation. We want to explore how the complex structure of the historical arguments of *The Fourth Political Theory* serves first to engage Dugin's readers and then gradually to radicalise them.

Our analysis will employ the work of H.J. Ingram and J.M. Berger on the extremist construction of identity. In *The Fourth Political Theory*, Dugin follows European New Right philosopher Alain de Benoist and gives an explicitly Gramscian priority to the struggle for ideological hegemony. Ingram's and Berger's work on the extremist construction of identity is relevant to an understanding of Dugin's use of historical

narratives because, in each case, their focus is also on ideology—in particular, on how textually embodied ‘systems of meaning’ contribute to radicalisation. Ideologies, they remind us, work to define and to legitimate an in-group’s self-conception—its distinctive beliefs and practices, the members who share these beliefs and practices and the out-groups who do not. Radicalisation first occurs when either perceived vulnerabilities within the group or perceived threats from outside cause normal demands for legitimation to escalate. At first the in-group may move to delegitimize competitors’ identities; then it may make the differences between itself and competitors more exclusive and even intrinsic. A further move to extremism occurs when an in-group’s escalating demands for legitimacy shift from ideas to acts, from strategies of legitimation and delegitimation to calls for discriminating behaviours. If, up to this point, extremist construction of identity might respect legality, a final escalation assumes charismatic authority to engage in violence against the out-group.

For Ingram and Berger, various rhetorical strategies accompany the extremist construction of identity. Escalating demands for legitimacy often entail increasing linkages: most obviously, out-groups can be linked, and linked more intrinsically, to perceived threats. At the same time, escalating demands for legitimacy encourage bundling. So, for example, bundling the link between perceived threats and out-groups with perceptions of vulnerabilities can produce a crisis construct that puts the in-group’s very existence into question. And, as the in-group grows more extreme, the crisis construct can be further bundled with various assessments of contemporary events as well as other traditions of discourse intensifying the initial sense of existential crisis into an apocalyptic confrontation. Promoting this amplification is typically an attention to the scaling of both in-group and out-group, and of the stage on which their confrontation occurs.

Finally, escalating demands for legitimacy coincide with a shift from deliberative to automatic thinking. Appeals to deliberative thinking—developed arguments with evidentiary warrants and substantial engagement with alternative interpretations—may continue, in particular as a ‘hook’ for the uninitiated. But with greater extremism comes greater reliance on automatic thinking—the replacement of argument with assertion, more frequent appeals to emotion and the use of cruder stereotypes. Berger even imagines a sort of ‘Doppler effect’ of extremist ideology ‘in which settled past events are “red-shifted” – the fixed roots of a stabilizing in-group identity – while the frenetic pace of current events and near-future expectations is “blue-shifted” – careening ever faster toward adherents’ present day’.<sup>4</sup>

Such processes, which Ingram and Berger chart over multiple texts in the jihadist or Christian Identity movements, we hope to show are also at play in the layerings of historical argument in *The Fourth Political*

*Theory.* As Dugin moves from a political history of modernity to the battle for postmodernity to the ‘another beginning’ of Martin Heidegger both the vulnerability of the in-group and the threats of out-groups intensify into a crisis concept. At each step Dugin will forge strategic linkages to other traditions of discourse, the extremely complex bundles further intensifying the crisis concept. Dugin will relentlessly scale upward the out-groups that pose the threat, even as he alternatively adjusts the scale of the in-group down and up both to accentuate its vulnerability and magnify the confrontation’s significance. Always, he broadens the historical and geographical stage. And as urgency grows, Dugin, too, shifts from a pretense to deliberative thought to a desperate demand for an ‘active metaphysics’ for ‘the end of times’ (4PT, 183; *Vvedeniye*, 244).

### A Political History of Modernity

A political history of modernity initially provides Dugin the opening for the fourth political theory. Three political ideologies, each organised around a distinctive normative subject, define this history. The first modern political ideology was the liberalism of the European Enlightenment. The normative subject of liberal ideology was, according to Dugin, the utilitarian individual of the Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer. Free markets, private property and contractual relations secured this individual from all forms of collective authority—be they religious institutions, state power or social hierarchy. In the nineteenth century, Marxian socialism countered the individual with class. From the standpoint of class, the tenets of liberalism were mechanisms of Capital’s oppression of the worker. In the twentieth century, fascism also rejected liberal individualism—most notoriously, in Germany, appealing to a biological conception of race. The fascist alternative succumbed quickly amidst the Second World War, but the communist alternative continued until the Soviet Union’s collapse left liberalism unchallenged, a triumph celebrated in Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

Dugin’s political history of modernity presents a relatively well-developed argument against what political theorists call a thin liberalism. This form of Dugin’s argument has points of contact both with Western communitarian conservatism and with elements of the Western Left. Indeed, Dugin’s analysis at this point resembles the argument of Karl Polanyi’s 1944 classic *The Great Transformation*. Polanyi also saw fascism and communism as failed alternatives to what he ironically called the liberal utopia of the ‘invisible hand’. And Polanyi likewise imagined a new alternative to self-interested individualism in his own democratic socialism.

Dugin’s argument, as it proceeds to the battle for postmodernity and a project for a Heideggerian ‘another beginning’, will go in a very

different direction than either Western communitarian conservatives or Polanyi's democratic socialism. The points of contact here are tactical. Alexander Mihailovic points out that Dugin began to pay greater attention to tactics after he accepted the invitation of free-jazz musician and artist-provocateur Sergei Kuryokhin in 1995 to run as an NBP candidate in Duma elections. The campaign was an utter failure but from Kuryokhin's 'totalistic, mass-oriented' circus of theatrical and musical 'happenings' Dugin learned 'the impressive striving to bring together absolutely everything' and the importance of casting a wide net. Kuryokhin, Mihailovic concludes, motivated Dugin to make his works 'attention-grabbing spectacles'.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the points of contact with Western communitarian conservatives or democratic socialists lie less in the substance of actually shared ideas than in points of entry into the construction of extremist identity.

Indeed, a careful reading of Dugin's initial formulation of the historical argument for the fourth political theory reveals its considerable potential for escalation. An incipient escalation is evident in how Dugin constructs the in-group and its vulnerability. At times, Dugin presents the in-group—in a non-extremist manner—in terms of its shared experience: it is the 'population' of the Russian Federation. 'The majority of Russian people', Dugin writes, 'suffer from their integration into global society'. He then shifts to more essentialist language, adding, 'as a loss of their own *identity*' (4PT, 14; ChPT, 8) and as an attack on 'the *instinctive* foundations' of their society (4PT, 152; ChPT, 45) [authors' emphases].

Another escalation occurs in Dugin's construction of out-groups and the threats they pose. Although the 'scholarly' Dugin of *The Fourth Political Theory* discreetly avoids explicit statements of anti-Semitism, those to whom he specifically assigns responsibility for importing liberalism into the Russian Federation—Yegor Gaidar, Anatoly Chubais and the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky—all have Jewish backgrounds (4PT, 152–3; ChPT, 45–6). References to the French anthropologist Georges Dumézil (for example, 4PT, 68; *Vvedeniye*, 310) reveal a rhetorical strategy of indirection. Dumézil famously investigated the origins of the three orders of priests, warriors and peasants in traditional Indo-European society. Vadim Rossman, in his history of post-Soviet intellectual anti-Semitism, supplies the tacit contrast from an important essay from a younger, and less discreet, Dugin, 'The Goals and Tasks of Our Revolution'. 'Within Indo-European civilization', Dugin wrote in this essay,

traders ... emerged only at the later stages of development as a foreign and racially alien component .... 'The Semites' ... were the bearers of the trade order .... They are the social saboteurs, the social 'strangers' within the economic system of Indo-European white people.<sup>6</sup>



The inference is unavoidable. It is a Jewish Westernised elite who victimised the Russian people and it is a Jewish Westernised elite who 'engaged in careerism, privatization, and setting up their own little deals ... fulfilling', Dugin concludes, 'the guidelines of the Western curators of the breakdown of the Soviet and Russian state' (4PT, 152; *ChPT*, 46).

Here Dugin adds to his Russian 'fifth column' argument a 'Western conspiracy' argument. Conspiracy theory has had wide appeal to Russians who lived through the collapse of the Soviet Union and it plays a key role in Dugin's understanding of history. In 1992 and again in 2005, Dugin published *Conspirology*, a work in which he proves 'a prolific aggregator of conspiracy theories' and provides them with a 'scientific' justification as archetypes of national consciousness.<sup>7</sup> This combination, Viktor Shnirelman shows, 'invariably arrives' at anti-Semitism – what we might call a metonymical anti-Semitism in which the figure of the Jew stands in for modernity's dark forces – and, to be sure, in *The Fourth Political Theory*, George Soros and Alfa Bank's Arven Friedman are the faces of those familiar bogeys of the paranoid style, the Trilateral Commission and the Council of Foreign Relations.<sup>8</sup>

With this conspiriological cast, Dugin can significantly broaden the scope of his argument and move from his political history of modernity to his depiction of the battle for postmodernity. Both twentieth-century Nazism and communism, Dugin concedes, were compromised by crimes. These crimes, however, were not essential to the anti-liberalism of either Nazism or communism. Rather, Dugin adopts a logic of inverted projection and blames the victim. For Dugin, Auschwitz and the Gulag actually originated in the socially corrosive ideas of the trading order, the materialism and universalism of which infected Nazism and communism. It is hypocrisy, then, that liberalism's agents use the spectre of Auschwitz (or the Gulag) to preempt rivals.<sup>9</sup> It is also a ruse that they use to obscure that they themselves are the architects of their own liberal Auschwitz. Hitler's racism was only one form among many. What Dugin calls 'the monotonic processes' of the Western model of capitalist globalisation actually provide 'the purest manifestation' of racism. These processes constitute 'moral genocide' (4PT, 45; *Vvedeniye*, 52, 53); they erode collective identities and erase historical memories. 'Liberalism', Dugin concludes, 'is responsible for no fewer historical crimes' than its rivals. 'It is responsible for slavery, for the destruction of the Native Americans in the United States, for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, [and] the devastation and economic exploitation of millions' (4PT, 65–6; *Vvedeniye*, 303–4).

### The Battle for Postmodernity

Central to this broadening indictment of liberalism is Dugin's use of 'Integral Traditionalism'. Integral Traditionalism developed in the early

twentieth century as a repudiation of what it saw as a modernity that had abandoned the perennial wisdom that was the secret core of all religions. For René Guénon, whose writings constituted the first systematic statement of Integral Traditionalism, so degenerate was modern society that initiation into the movement required aesthetic or philosophical withdrawal. Other Traditionalists were less comprehensively pessimistic. Julius Evola, a significant figure in the milieu of Italian Fascism, politicised Integral Traditionalism and argued for a militant assault on modernity.

Dugin played a leading role in mediating Integral Traditionalism to Soviet Russia and, for many commentators, it is the organising centre of his thought.<sup>10</sup> Traditionalism helps Dugin put distance between his thought and German Nazism. Traditionalism also allows him to extend the critique of liberal modernity. Traditionalism links the threat to contemporary Russia to what he considers to be the myriad depravities that plague the West, and it allows him to bundle these threats into one comprehensive crisis that can be scaled upward to the experience of all humanity.

Without rivals, liberalism, according to Dugin, mutates into a post-modern lifestyle. The persecution of Tradition now yields to an 'even more terrifying' indifference: under a 'chaotic 'tolerance' scraps of disparate syncretic cults assemble and reassemble in global pseudo-religions (4PT, 26; ChPT, 21). Consumer goods become the primary concern of the human imagination. 'A liberal society can understand everything', Dugin laments, 'but life without a washing machine? ... There is no such thing. Life is the washing machine' (4PT, 85; ChPT, 80–1).<sup>11</sup> The sense of crisis grows as Dugin surrounds it with a dense network of concepts that he draws from an ever-widening range of reference. Rarely, however, does he explicate the concepts in the mode of deliberative thinking; rather his use of concepts is largely to evoke automatic thinking and emotional reactions.<sup>12</sup> Dugin does draw on radical-right St. Petersburg philosopher Alexander Sekatsky: a glamour code demands conformity to a shifting cosmetic superficiality (4PT, 45; Vvedeniye, 52). But he prefers to draw 'dark inspiration' (4PT, 23; ChPT, 18) from the pantheon of postmodernism. He samples Michel Foucault (4PT, 191; Vvedeniye, 262–3): the post-political becomes the biopolitical management of the body. He enlists Paul Virilio (4PT, 201; Vvedeniye, 177): the accelerated pace of technological change creates a dromocratic society structured around speed. He appeals to Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard (4PT, 13, 151; ChPT, 7, 43): capitalist marketing ends in a society of the spectacle and a play of simulacra that can indulge any desire. The post-state, Dugin writes in one of the perfervid rhetorical episodes that regularly punctuate *The Fourth Political Theory*, is 'a sort of pirate republic, ... a Brazilian carnival', a world turned upside down, a kind of 'Saturnalia rendered permanent' (4PT, 200; Vvedeniye, 176).

Post-humans inhabit this post-state. The increasing intensity of Dugin's crisis concept also expands the out-groups and renders their composition ever more intrinsic and ever more subhuman. Dugin's list of 'grotesques' (4PT, 150; ChPT, 43) is long: feminists, lesbians, homosexuals, the transgendered, "freaks" and "monsters", "transvestites" and "degenerates" (4PT, 26, 191; ChPT, 21; *Vvedeniye*, 162). Dugin draws additional 'dark inspiration' from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. Postmodernity is rhizomatic: it propagates multidirectionally and is prone to hybridisation. 'People become bits and pieces'; apolitical individuals become Deleuze and Guattari's fragmented 'dividuals', who, in turn, become the media-bewildered 'schizo-masses' of postmodern society (4PT, 150, 171; ChPT, 43 and *Vvedeniye*, 169). Ultimately, post-anthropology becomes the kingdom of the machine. Among 'the unlimited multitudes of the flowers of putrefaction' (4PT, 208) will be clones and cyborgs, transhumans and robots. For Dugin, the image that best captures post-human anthropology is a modern dance club where 'creatures of uncertain sex, undefined appearance, and vague identity' (4PT, 171; *Vvedeniye*, 169) surrender their wills to an electronic beat.

Dugin's account of the battle for postmodernity escalates the extremist construction of identity not only in ideas, and reasons for dissent, but now also in action, and incentives for battle. Here Guénon's aestheticism and the nostalgic character of his classic Traditionalism lose their unequivocal positivity. Rather, Dugin prefers Evola's militant Traditionalism—a militancy that Dugin foregrounds by linking Evola's Traditionalism to the Conservative Revolution movement during the German Weimar Republic.<sup>13</sup> How did it happen, Dugin has the Conservative Revolution ask Guénon, that humanity lost its way? The suspicion arose, Dugin continues, '[M]aybe those sacred forms of traditional society, [of] which we could still catch a glimpse ... until the onset of modernity, carried in themselves a[n] ... element of decay'. Guénon's Traditionalism, Dugin concludes, offers only to return to a condition when the first symptoms of a 'fatal incurable illness' became manifest, when what is necessary is, with Evola and the Conservative Revolution, 'to pull out from the structure of the world the roots of the evil' (4PT, 95; ChPT, 94).

Even as Dugin forecloses a retreat along modernity's line of march, he 'blue-shifts'—to use Berger's notion of the Doppler effect of extremist ideology—contemporary expectations. The present is a climactic moment. Postmodern fragmentation opens up new 'holes' in postmodern reality and makes possible what Sekatsky calls a 'metaphysics of debris' in which, as Dugin cites the Gospel of Mark 12:10, the stone that the builder rejected becomes the cornerstone (4PT, 22–3; ChPT, 16–7). Because postmodernity dissipates liberalism's history of unidirectional forward progress amidst Deleuze and Guattari's *espace lisse*, it reveals the 'reversibility of time' (4PT, 67ff.; *Vvedeniye*, 308ff.)—time as

politically constructed and conceptually plural—and the possibility of ‘another beginning’. Because postmodernity renders everything foolish, a repressed pre-modernity can return, and circulate unimpeded on the postmodern technologies of internet society. For Dugin, one sign that pre-modernity will wreak its revenge is al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden. His physiognomy, his gestures, his appearance on our screens are a spectacle worthy of Hollywood (4PT, 92–3; ChPT, 90). Another sign is the Moscow theatre hostage crisis of 23 October 2002, when Chechen terrorists took advantage of an audience confused by the special effects in the kitsch-musical *Nord-Ost*. The Conservative Revolutionaries, Dugin proclaims, present themselves in an analogous manner:

Let the buffoonery of postmodernism have its turn.... Let nothing carry along in itself the substance of the world – then secret doors will open, and ancient eternal archetypes will come to the surface and, in a frightful way, put an end to the game.

(4PT, 97–8; ChPT, 96–7)

### A Heideggerian ‘Another Beginning’

The final layer of historical argument in *The Fourth Political Theory* calls upon the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. The Heidegger whom Dugin wants is neither the early Heidegger of *Being and Time* (1927) nor the later Heidegger of the ‘Question concerning Technology’ (1954) but a Heidegger of a ‘middle period’ of 1936–1945, a period that Dugin carefully dates to avoid Heidegger’s most direct involvement with the National Socialist regime. This middle-period Heidegger—a Heidegger that Dugin can associate with Weimar’s Conservative Revolution and a dissident National Socialism that rejected racial science but not cultural revolution—helps Dugin establish the intellectual location from which he also wishes to appear. This middle-period Heidegger—a Heidegger who indicted the nihilism of Western metaphysics—also links to both Dugin’s political history of modernity and Dugin’s account of the terrifying spectacle of the post-human, the new bundle of ideas further amplifying threats posed by Western liberalism.

But even more importantly, Dugin’s Heidegger is the philosopher of ‘another beginning’ (*der andere Anfang*)—a ‘certain daring endeavor’, Dugin explains, by which a saving remnant of ‘future ones’—Heidegger’s *Künftige*—cancel a Western philosophical tradition that emphasised immediately present ‘beings’ and ‘surg[ed] directly into the pure element of Being through terror and violence’.<sup>14</sup> Two concepts—*Dasein* (often translated as ‘being there’) and *Ereignis* (sometimes translated as ‘The Event’ or the ‘Coming-into-View’)—are at play in this conception of ‘another beginning’ and figure in a further escalation of Dugin’s construction of extremist identity. For Heidegger, the primary force of

*Dasein* was to recover a sense of the human as a being attuned to question of the meaning of Being—a sense that is brought into focus by the ontological courage to face the immanence of death. For Heidegger, too, authentic existence, as opposed to tranquilised existence of modernity's neutered *Das Man* (meaning both 'the one', the generic individual, and 'the they', the anonymous public), required 'thereness' or 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*), a concrete rootedness in the world.

In Dugin's presentation of *Dasein*, something of these senses remains. He identifies *Dasein* as the subject of the fourth political theory precisely because it differs from the abstract subjects of previous ideologies. Dugin also identifies *Dasein* as the subject of the fourth political theory because it differs from the death-denying illusions of unlimited progress. What Dugin particularly values in *Dasein* is, however, its collective dimension. For Dugin, *Dasein* corresponds to 'the ethnos'. Hence Dugin can write without contradiction that 'the ethnos is the greatest value of the fourth political theory'. It is the 'community of language, religious belief, daily life, and sharing of resources and goals' (4PT, 47; *Vvedeniye*, 54).

Both the spatiality of the concept of *Dasein* and Dugin's accentuation of its most *völkisch* aspects link to yet another intellectual tradition from which Dugin draws—Eurasianism. This linkage works, in turn, to set further apart the vulnerable in-group. Originally, Eurasianism emerged among elements of the Russian emigré community in the 1920s. These emigrés saw a synthesis of Slavic and Turkic-Iranian culture as the successor to the Mongol empire; for them, the Bolshevik Revolution was a necessary reaction against Westernisation that would eventually return to Russia's imperial and even Orthodox roots. In the 1980s and 1990s this original Eurasianism served Dugin well as a convenient way of underwriting the red-brown alliance. Soon, however, Dugin was crossing the Russian inheritance with a Western European legacy. The resulting neo-Eurasianism informed his *Foundations of Geopolitics*. And it was the inspiration for the founding of the *Evrazia* (Eurasia) movement in 2001. *Evrazia* functioned briefly as a political party before becoming the International Eurasian Movement (MED) in 2003 and sponsoring the establishment of the Eurasian Youth Movement (ESM) in 2005.<sup>15</sup>

Among the Western European thinkers upon whom Dugin's neo-Eurasianism draws, the most important is the political theorist Carl Schmitt. Like Heidegger, Schmitt was closely associated with the German Conservative Revolution. Just as Dugin employs the Conservative Revolution to imagine a dissident National Socialism, Dugin uses Schmitt to reassert a cultural alternative to a Soviet Eurasianism of the 1950s and 1960s in which Lev Gumilev imagined the ethnos as 'an organic entity written into an "accommodating landscape"'. By contrast, in works such as *The Nomos of the Earth* (1950), Schmitt understood the history of international politics in terms of a sequence of territorial orders divided

among great spaces (the *Großraum*), in each of which distinct political *ideas* operated. In effect, this understanding of the history of international politics allows Dugin to shed Gumilev's 'biologism' and spiritualise racism among a variety of civilisational ideas that occupy less a specific physical habitat than a 'sacred geography'.

In *The Fourth Political Theory*, Dugin repeatedly endorses a multipolarity of civilisational ideas as a counter to homogenising Westernisation. These passages in *The Fourth Political Theory* may have public relations value, but they should not obscure another use to which Dugin puts Schmitt. On the first page of the introduction to *The Fourth Political Theory*, Dugin calls on Schmitt's 'theory of the partisan'—a theory that resonates with Heidegger's notion of an authentic being-toward-death and now points to Dugin's use of the conception of what Heidegger calls the *Ereignis*. There can be no identity without a threat to existence. Geopolitical history must not end quietly with Fukuyama's vision of a US dominated globalised order. Rather, it must embrace Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' (4PT, 111; *ChPT*, 184–5).

This combination of Schmitt with Huntington further escalates the in-group/out-group dichotomies in the extremist construction of identity. Faced with the liberal and postmodern threat the various manifestations of the civilisation concept become a stark confrontation between the West and the Rest. Likewise, Russia, which Dugin imagines must lead the struggle against the West, faces an existential choice: as the title of the introduction announces, to be or not to be. Dugin scales up these dichotomies by enlisting Halford Mackinder's opposition between a Eurasian Heartland and an Atlanticist World Island and Alfred Mahan's opposition between land and maritime power, and by imagining conspirologically all history as an occult Punic War.<sup>16</sup> He simultaneously draws into these dichotomies *The Fourth Political Theory*'s profusion of cultural alternatives—between community and individual, between socialism and capitalism, between Orthodoxy and Latin Christendom, and between those who revere Tradition and those who revile it. And, if a reader were curious enough to proceed from *The Fourth Political Theory* to Dugin's webpages they would find that all these multifarious oppositions come to rest in a fundamental opposition between the Hyperborean (or Northern or Arctic) origins of a spiritual Indo-European culture and the devolving subhumanity of a materialist Southern Pole—of, in short, Aryan and Jew.<sup>17</sup>

All these escalating oppositions lead to the second Heideggerian concept that plays a role in how Dugin's reworking of historical understanding feeds into the extremist construction of identity—the concept of *Ereignis*. Dugin understands this concept as the sudden triumphant return of the question of the meaning of Being and so of the possibilities for authentic existence. This return comes exactly at the darkest moment of the world's night, when mankind finds itself at greatest risk.

Dugin's oracular language sets up his bundling of Heidegger's *Ereignis* with Christian eschatology, and a final intensification of Berger's 'Doppler Effect'. In 1999 Dugin joined the Old Ritualist branch of Russian Orthodoxy and he readily taps into this tradition's rich imagery and emotional language. In Christian eschatology, Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2: 3–7) imagines the kingdom of the anti-Christ being held back by a restrainer, or *katechon*. In Russian Orthodox eschatology the *katechon* followed the translation of empire from Rome to Constantinople to the 'third Rome', Moscow. Russia's historical mission as the *katechon* was progressively weakened, first and most catastrophically by the patriarch Nikon's liturgical reforms in the late seventeenth century, reforms that the Old Ritualists rejected. What Nikon began, Peter the Great's abolition of the patriarchate and then the Bolshevik Revolution continued. But even under the formally atheist Soviet Union vestiges of Russia's role as *katechon* remained. Stalin restored the patriarchate; Marxism, as a critical sociology, exposed the enemy; and Marxism, as a philosophy of the future, dreamt of overcoming alienation. Only with the collapse of the Soviet Union did this world 'come to its end' (4PT, 207).

To be sure, there is a geopolitical Dugin who tactically continues to present his vision of a multipolar world as a restraint on the American Empire and the basis of a Schmittian 'fourth nomos of the earth'. This is the Dugin of Geopolitika.ru, the website he runs, the Dugin who served on the board of ultranationalist oligarch Konstantin Malofeev's Katechon think tank, and the Dugin who is a member of the Kremlin-financed think tank the Izborsk Club. But there is no mistaking that the trajectory of *The Fourth Political Theory* leads to what Dugin calls '*the fact of the apocalypse*' (4PT, 27; *ChPT*, 23 [italics in original]). This Dugin explicitly breaks with Schmitt. In *Political Theology*, Schmitt had argued that the concept of sovereignty was to politics what God's relationship to the created world was to theology: it was the power to decide the state of exception when the rule of laws was suspended. With postmodernity, Dugin counters, this argument 'will not help us much, as we have crossed the boundaries of political theology' (4PT, 175; *Vvedeniye*, 173). If 'neither God nor man is there' amidst the 'absolute evil' of postmodernity, who then can save us? Who are the agents of another beginning? One answer is what Dugin calls 'political angelology'. Here Dugin resembles earlier conservatives, both at the time of the French Revolution and also during Weimar Germany, for whom political theology was also no longer a viable option. The final act, Dugin proclaims, may well be a '*war of angels*' (4PT, 176; *Vvedeniye*, 174 [italics in original]), a war between defiant demons who impose administrative discipline on an egalitarian pandemonium and the obedient hierarchies united in worshipful praise around the throne of God.

We saw earlier that Dugin had less in common with Guénon's aesthetic Traditionalism than with Evola's militant traditionalism. Similarly, as Dugin presents 'another beginning' in *The Fourth Political Theory*, he may imagine a 'war of angels', but his emphasis falls on realised eschatology. 'The American Empire', Dugin writes in the last chapter of *The Fourth Political Theory*, 'should be destroyed' (4PT, 193; *Vvedeniye*, 634). With this pronouncement comes a second answer to the question of the agents of another beginning. In the 1930s, that answer was the SS's 'political soldier', who lived out Heidegger's being-toward-death in the willingness to kill and to die for political ideals. But postmodernity had rendered the political soldier a simulacrum. Dugin recalls his own NBP experience: instead of embracing an authentic politics of existential choice, it degenerated into hooliganism (4PT, 137; *ChPT*, 76–7).

Postmodern society is, consequently, entirely without resources for redemption. Thus, the agent of 'another beginning' must come from without, in the form Dugin calls the 'Radical Subject'. Various eschatological traditions, Dugin explains, recognise an abyss of corruption so profound that spiritual realisation becomes impossible. The Old Believers had had this experience repeatedly in their history. The young Dugin, too, had had this experience. The late 1970s and early 1980s in the Soviet Union were 'an awakening into pure hell'. The Radical Subject emerges from these liminoid conditions and—Dugin is categorical on this point—neither through reason nor through experience, but rather subjectively when, as an emotional revulsion or an aesthetic revolt, suddenly from within comes 'a sudden burst of distance'.<sup>18</sup>

The concept of the 'Radical Subject' is the culmination of the extremist construction of identity in *The Fourth Political Theory*. For all that Dugin has, since the late 1990s, worked to burnish his academic credentials, for all the erudite references with which he populates *The Fourth Political Theory*, he emblazons it with the eight-pointed 'Star of Chaos', and ends with incendiary images of the ignition of philosophical fire and explosive rebellion. The Radical Subject is the 'new man' of the palingenetic myth of a society reborn from the ruins, wielding the constructive chaos of 'pre-order' against the Satanically confused chaos of postmodernity's post-order. The Radical Subject supplies Dugin with the charismatic authority to pass the sentence of death on Russia's fifth column, to call for the annihilation of liberalism, to proclaim a crusade against the American Empire, and to declare war on the kingdom of the Anti-Christ. Perhaps the most dramatic example of what Dugin means by the Radical Subject came in 2014, when Dugin mobilised support for the Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics, urged the ESM to send volunteers to liberate Novorossiia and spoke openly of killing Russia's enemies in southeastern Ukraine—actions that provoked a student petition against Dugin at Moscow State University and ended in his dismissal.



Perhaps the most fitting image of the Radical Subject comes from one of the more prominent websites by which the disaffected might find their way into Dugin's Alt-Right universe—4threvolutionarywar.com. Here at the top of the page we see Alexander Dugin in profile, a bright yellow-orange nuclear mushroom cloud in the background, facing west, an RPG-7 anti-tank grenade launcher on his shoulder.

## Conclusion

Alexander Dugin's *The Fourth Political Theory* unfurls three levels of historical narrative—a political history of modernity resolves into the battle for postmodernity that provides the possibility for a Heideggerian 'another beginning'. We have argued that this layering of historical narratives employs many of the processes that Ingram and Berger identify in the extremist construction of identity. Even in the apparently conventional political history of modernity in-groups and vulnerabilities and out-groups and threats are linked intrinsically while at the same time there is a conspirological scaling upwards. Dugin's deployment of Integral Traditionalism in the account of the battle for postmodernity amplifies this scaling upward into a crisis concept, enveloping it with an increasingly emotional language. Linkages to the German Conservative Revolution shift the response to this crisis from the advocacy of intellectual alternatives to the advocacy of militant actions. Finally, the bundling of the project for a Heideggerian 'another beginning' with neo-Eurasianism and Orthodox eschatology produces a Manichean clash of civilisations, and through the 'Doppler effect' of intensifying urgency, a proclamation of the value of war and a program of relegitimated violence.

*The Fourth Political Theory* is, therefore, a coherent system of extremist ideology, richly embellished with hooks to engage the curious and calibrated to radicalise the curious into the activist. It is an extremist ideology that, with the increasing prominence given to Schmitt and Heidegger, Dugin is directing beyond the Russian Federation to constituencies throughout Europe, central and southern Asia, the Near East, and—as the Arktos translation signals—to the English-speaking world. Contesting such an elaborately syncretist system of meaning, and countering the processes that contribute to the extremist construction of identity, will require—as Ingram and Berger also demonstrate—a commitment to strategic communication every bit as complex as Dugin's own. To confront such systems of meaning directly often further legitimates them. To denigrate them—to present Dugin as a charlatan—risks contributing to the in-group's perception of its own vulnerabilities and increasing the perception of out-group threats. To exaggerate them—to present Dugin as 'Putin's Rasputin'—risks compounding the extremists' own tendencies to take an emotional turn and scale upwards. Countering

extremist systems of meaning, Ingram and Berger recommend, must itself attend to historical narratives—narratives that un-bundle the crisis concept, scaling it back and reducing its urgency by un-linking threats and out-groups and vulnerabilities and in-groups, and by providing alternative, more inclusive identities.

## Notes

- 1 *Chetvertaya politicheskaya teoriya* (Saint Petersburg: Amphora, 2009). Henceforth we refer to this work as *ChPT*. In 2014, *Chetvertiy Put': Vvedeniye v chetvertuyu teoriyu* (Moscow: Akademicheskiiy Proyekt, 2014) reprised ten chapters of the earlier work, adding an additional 32 chapters. Henceforth we refer to this work as *Vvedeniye*. The English-language translation appeared in two Arktos volumes, *The Fourth Political Theory* (henceforth *4PT*) published in 2012 and *The Rise of the Fourth Political Theory* published in 2017. The first volume, *4PT*, corresponds generally to *ChPT*, introduction, and chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 and 8 and *Vvedeniye*, chapters I: 2, IV: 1, IV: 3; III: 1, 6, 7. The second volume corresponds generally to *ChPT*, chapters 3, 6, 7, 9–15. Appendix II of *4PT*, 'The Metaphysics of Chaos', 204–11 was separately published in English. Because we are writing for an English-language audience for whom *4PT* will be more readily available, we have given this volume priority in our analysis.
- 2 Currently, the best sources for Dugin's biography are Clover, *Black Wind, passim*; Laruelle, *Russian Version*; and Umland, 'Uncivil Society', 97–141.
- 3 All three of these reasons are on display in Dugin's presentation to the Identitarian Ideas conference, Stockholm, 28 July 2012. At [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X-o\\_ndhSVA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X-o_ndhSVA). This annual conference is organised by Daniel Friberg, CEO of Arktos Media, which publishes Dugin's English translations.
- 4 J.M. Berger, 'Extremist Construction', 50.
- 5 Alexander Mihailovic, 'Hijacking Authority', 95–96.
- 6 Vadim Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Communism*, 43–5. Duménil figures particularly prominently in Dugin's recent *Noomakhia* lectures. Archived 3 October 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181003144249/https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/introduction-aims-and-tasks-noomakhia>. The essay 'Goals and Tasks' remains on Dugin's arctogaia.com webpage.
- 7 Charles Clover, *Black Wind*, 186.
- 8 Victor Shnirelman, 'Building a Bridge', 205.
- 9 Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Anti-Semitism*, 57 remarks: 'in Dugin's "grand narrative" we live in the post-Nuremberg rather than the post-Auschwitz world'.
- 10 In particular, for Laruelle, *Russian Version*, and Sedgwick, 'Occult Dissident Culture'.
- 11 Cf. Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (1953), where the washing machine was iconic of Western freedom.
- 12 Maria Engström, 'Contemporary Russian Messianism', 358–9 on the 'emotional turn' in the Russian radical right's critique of 'liberalism'.
- 13 As Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, 'Dugin a Traditionalist?' 666 discern.
- 14 Alexander Dugin, *Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning*, 143; Dugin, *Khaydegger: Filosofiya drugogo nachalo*, 101.
- 15 Gumilev argued that each ethnos possessed a unique genotype; these 'biological communities' operated in a 'biological time' of inevitable growth,

- decay and regeneration. By contrast, Dugin's use of Schmitt places the ethnos in historical time and makes Eurasianism an activist program. See Mark Bassin, 'Gumilev and the European New Right', 846–7; Laruelle, 'Biologisme et eurasisme', *passim*; and Shnirelman, 'New Racism', 129–30.
- 16 The masthead of Geopolitika.ru reads 'Carthago delenda est' [Carthage must be destroyed].
- 17 For the myriad oppositions in Dugin's thought, see Alexander Höllwerth, *Das sakrale eurasische Imperium*, Part III [Dugin's Construction of the World and Reality].
- 18 Alexander Dugin, 'Радикальный Субъект и метафизика боли' [The Radical Subject and Metaphysical Pain], *Platonizm.ru*. Archived 23 January 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180123153246/http://www.platonizm.ru/content/dugin-radikalnyy-subekt-i-metafizika-boli>.

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## **Part II**

# **The Past in the Present**

History in the Public Sphere



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# 8 The Problem of Alt-Right Medievalist White Supremacy, and Its Black Medievalist Answer

*Cord J. Whitaker*

‘Elite human beings of the 14th century have a hue, and it is white’.<sup>1</sup> So writes medieval literature scholar Geraldine Heng. Famed sociologist and activist W.E.B. Du Bois proclaimed at the beginning of the 1900s that the ‘problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line’.<sup>2</sup> Heng might as well have been writing about more recent centuries, too, including the twenty-first. The persistence of white supremacist ideas in the twenty-first century could not have been made clearer than when, in August 2017, the Alt-Right with other white nationalist and neo-Nazi groups staged the ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. That white supremacy persists across historical periods was part of the demonstrators’ point. They claimed to take their cues from medieval and ancient traditions, and they asserted the depth of their historical roots by carrying Crusader flags, Viking flags and shields adorned with ancient symbols of Roman imperial power.<sup>3</sup> The architecture of the Alt-Right’s rise to prominence in the United States can be traced, through conduits including former White House Chief Strategist Steven Bannon, to Russian political analyst and erstwhile professor Alexander Dugin.<sup>4</sup> Dugin has written voluminously in support of ‘the global rehabilitation of Tradition, the sacred, the religious, the caste-related... the hierarchical, and not equality, justice, or freedom’ and ‘returning to the Middle Ages or turning to them to look for inspiration...’<sup>5</sup> A tenet of Alt-Right ideology is to agitate for the transformation of the United States into a polity in which membership requires whiteness, or a white ethnostate. In order to give credence to their desire, they refer to medieval Europe as their precedent.<sup>6</sup> This essay offers some theories about how and why the Middle Ages animates the Alt-Right white nationalist movement. That the fourteenth century saw the ascription of a white hue to ‘elite human beings’ and that Alt-Right adherents and apologisers imagine an idyllic and all-white medieval Europe are only parts of the story.

## **The Middle Ages’ Mythical Whiteness**

They are, to be sure, parts of a story that is erroneous. One need look no further than the patron saint of the Holy Roman Empire in order to



know that medieval Europe recognised some very 'elite' human beings who were not depicted as white Europeans. St. Maurice is described as Egyptian in the version of his saint's life offered in the medieval hagiographic compendium known as *Legenda Aurea*. From at least the thirteenth century in the German environs of the Empire's seat, he was nearly always depicted as black, with clear African features.<sup>7</sup> Depictions of him such as that at Magdeburg Cathedral remain extant. The presence of Africans and others who are now called people of colour in medieval Europe was not limited to such exalted figures as patron saints.

Recent studies in bioarchaeology have 'shown that Medieval Europe was not exclusively populated by people with White European ancestry although this myth continues to be perpetuated in the public's imagination'.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the enslavement of sub-Saharan African people, among others including Slavs, helped populate medieval Europe with people of colour. Though Portuguese Prince Henry the Navigator's shipment of 235 enslaved African people into Lagos, Portugal in 1444 is often recognised as the largest importation of black people into medieval Europe, 'by the beginning of the 11th century AD, people from the Sub-Sahara were being transported and sold into Europe' regularly, if in smaller numbers at a time than Henry's breakwater cargo.<sup>9</sup> It is also important to keep in mind that Mediterranean and African people had a presence in Europe going back at least as far as Roman imperial governance. Take, for example, the tomb of 'Victoris natione Maurum' (Victor of the nation of the Moors), a black African Roman soldier, in South Shields, England.<sup>10</sup> 'Moor' can refer variably to Islamic heritage, African origin, or both, and Victor likely had darker skin.<sup>11</sup> Despite the presence of Mediterranean and African people with darker complexions in medieval Europe, the myth of a heterogeneously white medieval Europe persists.

The myth persists largely because of popular cultural discourses that have been extant and operating since at least the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' 'medieval revival' literary and artistic movements. Treating the legacy of that century's pre-Raphaelite artists as it informs aesthetic choices in HBO's popular television drama *Game of Thrones*, medievalists Helen Young and Stephanie Downes summarise:

Popular culture narratives and the visual imagery through which they are told typically orient audiences towards hegemonic ideological positions. In this case, the aesthetics of white femininity that dominate western medievalist screen culture in the 21st century are part of a cross-temporal framing of the Middle Ages as white space and the originary source of white cultural and racial identity.<sup>12</sup>

The imagination of medieval Europe as the source of white cultural and racial identity has been a powerful driver of culture for a long time now. These have included stereotypes and prejudices, but, more to the point,

they have animated ‘racialized emotions’ and ‘racialized reactions’.<sup>13</sup> Among these emotions and reactions are sexual and possessive desire for the medieval white feminine ideal. Pride and a sense of empowerment attend racialised reactions as well, especially inasmuch as the medieval white feminine stereotype includes within itself reproductivity and the potential for the idealised medieval world’s perpetuation. It is now an old myth that medieval Europe represents a set of homogeneously white ethnostates; yet it remains quite active.

### **The Modernist Fascist Roots of Alt-Right Medievalism**

What the Alt-Right represents and agitates for was far from new in August 2017. Yet—rather like the claim of *Game of Thrones*’ show-runners that their show represents the ‘real’ Middle Ages and not the romanticism or idealism of the ‘Disney Middle Ages’—the Alt-Right is an ideology that trades on its supposed novelty. In this regard, Alt-Right ideology mirrors the fascism to which it clearly hearkened in November 2016, well before ‘Unite the Right’. During the National Policy Institute’s annual conference in Washington, DC, held shortly after the electoral college victory that made Donald Trump president-elect of the United States, attendees responded to exhortations such as ‘Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!’ with Nazi salutes. According to historian and political theorist Roger Griffin, the Nazi’s Third Reich is one of only two successful and fascist movements in history. The other was contemporaneous in Mussolini’s Italy.<sup>14</sup> Both the Third Reich and the Third Rome were deeply involved in the business of revising history in order to promote national myths beneficial to their causes. The European Middle Ages were central to these histories, especially in the case of Italy’s fascists. Alt-Right ideology is at heart at least as old as fascism, and central elements are at least as old as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ medieval revival.

Alt-Right ideology, however, is not, to be clear, any direct outgrowth of the cultures and ideas of the actual Middle Ages. When the mostly young, white and male adherents of the Alt-Right showed up in Charlottesville, their accoutrements bespoke the role of *modern* medievalism in racist ideologies. The ostensible purpose of the rally was to defend a statue of confederate leader Robert E. Lee and in order to defend such monuments generally. The location was also likely chosen because of the town’s leftist reputation, Virginia’s closely watched governor’s race and Charlottesville’s rather high-profile consideration of what to do with its Confederate monuments.<sup>15</sup> An additional factor may have been white nationalist and Alt-Right leader Richard Spencer’s relationship to the University of Virginia, of which he is an alumnus. He targeted Charlottesville for demonstrations before the now infamous rally, and he has targeted Charlottesville again since. Quite apart from the reasons

Spencer chose Charlottesville for the rally, demonstrators chose the Middle Ages for their affinities towards it. The Alt-Right and associated demonstrators donned generally respectable attire, following the lead of the slick and public-relations-savvy Spencer. The temporal play fundamental to the movement was on display when they added flags, symbols and other adornments with medieval European provenances to their decidedly modern fashions. These included the Othala rune which is associated with ‘ancestral homeland’ or ‘inheritance’ in runic writing and was adopted by the Nazis to represent the same xenophobic sentiment that underwrites the slogan ‘blood and soil’, which was also chanted at Charlottesville; symbols on display also included the Deus Vult cross associated with the Crusades.<sup>16</sup> Most importantly for this essay, Alt-Right demonstrators also carried medievalising shields adorned with, among other things, the Holy Roman Imperial black eagle. As the art historian and blogger known as medievalpoc promptly pointed out on social media, the black eagle was generally associated with none other than Saint Maurice, the black African patron saint of the Holy Roman Empire. The demonstrators’ symbols, whether on pennants or shields, indicate their ideology’s interest in an idea of the Middle Ages whose relation to the real historical period is rather confused.

Confusion is an element that adherents of the Alt-Right come by honestly, and they are indebted to their fascist forebears. Mussolini’s fascism was born of the effort to improve an Italy that he saw as having fallen precipitously from the powerful and glorious days of the Roman Empire. Mussolini started out with a nationalism that involved only an inward-facing racism that found expression in his aim to improve Italy and Italians. In 1921, Mussolini stated: ‘fascism must concern itself with the racial problem. Fascists must concern themselves with the health of the race by which history is made’. By 1928, Mussolini’s racism grew more outward in its perspective; he saw Europe as increasingly threatened by ‘blacks and yellows’, especially in that Africans and Asians boasted significantly higher birth rates than Europeans.<sup>17</sup> What’s more, the rise of Nazism in Germany was accompanied by a rise in anti-Italian sentiment that spurred at first Mussolini’s derision of German Aryanism, yet eventually led Mussolini to take on an “‘if you can’t beat them, join them” attitude’. Aaron Gillette concludes, ‘German propaganda against the non-Nordic peoples certainly wouldn’t sting if Mussolini decided that the Italians were themselves Nordic’.<sup>18</sup> The manipulation of—and outright lies about—racial identity was central to Mussolini’s effort to ‘improve’ Italians. Its integral role in Italy’s alliance with German Nazism shows confusion to be a valuable political tool whose users are sometimes, as in Mussolini’s case, quite aware of their revisionist practices.

In addition to revisionism concerning racial identities and presences, the medievalist temporal play that was on display in Charlottesville is another element of Alt-Right confusion that has its forebears in fascism. Under the influence of Italian philosopher, medievalist and antiquarian

Julius Evola, Benito Mussolini's fascism was medievalist and antiquarian. It engaged in temporal play that foreshadowed the form undertaken by the Alt-Right in contemporary politics. Mussolini's movement towards a fascism with outward-looking racism at its core was in part due to Evola's influence. Mussolini read Evola's *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* in the early 1940s and drew from it support for his movement's racist position that eugenics would improve the Italian 'race' by restoring to it the 'lost Roman virtues of courage, fortitude, discipline, and martial ardor'.<sup>19</sup> The effort to restore such 'lost' virtues was presented in tandem with Mussolini's objective 'to elevate the average Italian and to enucleate in him a new man'.<sup>20</sup> In order to achieve the goal of improving Italy's and its people's standings in the world, looking backwards was required—to Italy's Roman imperial past, to be sure, but also to the supposed glories of medieval European Christendom that comprised the Church seated at Rome.

Evola's approach to the Middle Ages helps to explain the provenance of the temporal play that has bizarre results such as young men self-seriously carrying shields with the Holy Roman Imperial eagle emblazoned on them in twenty-first-century Virginia. Evola espoused a form of 'Traditional' thought through which he

advanced a radical doctrine of anti-egalitarianism, anti-democracy, anti-liberalism and anti-Semitism. He scorned the modern world of popular rule and bourgeois values, democracy *and* socialism, seeing capitalism and communism as twin aspects of the benighted reign of materialism.<sup>21</sup>

Evola's disdain for modernity is on display in his not-so-subtly titled *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, or *Revolt Against the Modern World*, and it offers insight into why Charlottesville's demonstrators fashioned themselves modern-day knights. In *Revolt*, Evola makes the case that medieval knighthood is a spiritual identity, over and against—and even in place of—Christianity and the Church. Tracing the origins of knighthood to the 'Indo-Aryan' tradition (as he does throughout his work), he writes:

In the older versions of knightly ordination, a knight was ordained by another knight without the intervention of priests, almost as if in the warrior there was a force "similar to a fluid" that was capable of creating new knights by direct transmission; a witness to this practice is found in the Indo-Aryan tradition of 'warriors ordaining other warriors'.<sup>22</sup>

He goes on to call the chivalric class a competitor with and replacement for the priestly class. Indeed, he writes, 'chivalry, both in its spirit and in its ethics, is an organic part of the empire and not of the Church'.<sup>23</sup> In a

discussion of medieval popular literature's portrayal of weapons as symbols of 'spiritual or ethical virtues' designed to 'connect any chivalrous deed to an inner action', Evola turns to the 'mysticism' of weapons found in other 'traditional civilizations' and discusses the crafting of swords in the Japanese 'warrior aristocracy'. He demonstrates the priestliness of the militarist when he turns to 'Indo-Aryan' warriors 'competing victoriously in wisdom with the *brahmana* (that is, with the representatives of the priestly caste...)'.<sup>24</sup> For Evola, chivalry supersedes time and place such that the costumes of Charlottesville's demonstrators only make sense. For Evola, chivalry is trans-historical, but its medieval European iteration is special because of its proximity to modernity. Evola decries the 'decline of chivalry' in which:

the European nobility also eventually lost the spiritual element as a reference point for its highest 'faithfulness,' and thus became part of merely political organisms as in the case of the aristocracies of the national states that emerged after the collapse of the civilization of the Middle Ages.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, modernity and the rise of the nation-state have destroyed chivalry and have obscured the spiritual power of the knight. The 'spiritual element' to which Evola refers inheres in the European medieval political theory that a sovereign rules by divine right. The nobility's support of such a sovereign constitutes their 'spiritual element'. The rise of the nation-state, and the attendant decline in a sovereign's apparent divinity, in Evola's reckoning, strips the nobility of its higher calling. The Middle Ages represents, for the West, the latest period in which this brand of spiritual knighthood is fully intact and afforded the respect due to it.

The importance of the Middle Ages in the Alt-Right's narrative of spiritual knighthood is not lost on the modern movement's rank and file adherent. Even if movement leaders such as Spencer do not very often mention the Middle Ages per se, their interlocutors do. In 2015, Spencer spoke at a meeting of American Renaissance, a conservative organisation dedicated to so called 'race-realism', or the belief that race is not a socially constructed concept but that, rather, it is based in material, biological and ineluctable differences that cannot and should not be overcome.<sup>26</sup> During that speech, Spencer addresses 'white guilt', or the sense that it has become a bad thing to be white; he cites whites' 'capacity to become our own worst enemy...to disembody shame and eat it, and keep it inside ourselves'. He then blames the phenomenon largely on Jews, Judaism and their influence on the Christian tradition: 'white guilt has its roots in Judaism and Christianity', he asserts. An audience member responds to Spencer's claims by asserting that 'Christian civilization was very self-confident and accomplished very much for centuries, for

instance in *the Middle Ages*'. The commenter continues: 'white guilt' is a nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon.<sup>27</sup> Spencer's response is anything but a full-throated defence of Christianity. Registering Evola's position that chivalric 'Tradition' supersedes and replaces Christianity, Spencer calls 'white guilt' a 'post-Christian phenomenon' and states, 'I don't doubt that there were tremendous glories of Christian civilization'. He says so while raising his eyebrows as if he *does* indeed doubt it. Finally, he attributes to Christianity 'at least... a revolution of morality that made us interesting'. Spencer's two-mouthed treatment of Christianity reflects an Evolan approach that takes the Middle Ages as, on one hand, the all-important last moment when Tradition reigned supreme and, on the other hand, the decisive moment when Christian hegemony and its morality facilitated Tradition's momentous downfall into the maelstrom of modernity where power is political and earthly, not divine.

Like the fascists, Alt-Right leaders and adherents seek a return to a time when power was so unassailable that it appeared divinely authorised, and that power belonged to those with whom they identify. A significant—perhaps the most significant—element in Alt-Right and fascist claims to historical power is the deployment of history known as palingenesis. Historian Aaron Gillette defines the phenomenon as a myth of national resurgence and regeneration. As Mussolini's fascism matured, it became increasingly bound with the palingenesis on display in his position that the 'lost Roman virtues of courage, fortitude, discipline, and martial ardor' could be 'rekindled' and 'permanently bred' into the Italian until he became a 'new man'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, palingenesis has been identified as perhaps *the* central, defining component of true-to-form fascism.

The centrality of palingenesis, or that of its more specific form 'palingenetic ultranationalism', has been borne out in theorists' attempts to define fascism. As US Secretary of State (1997–2001) Madeleine Albright puts it in her 2018 book on fascism's global resurgence, 'there are no fully agreed-upon or satisfactory definitions, though academic writers have spilled oceans of ink in the attempt'.<sup>29</sup> Albright ultimately relies on her considerable experience as a diplomat to adopt a definition focused on a fascist leader's actions:

a Fascist is someone who identifies strongly with and claims to speak for a whole nation or group, is unconcerned with the rights of others, and is willing to use whatever means are necessary—including violence—to achieve his or her goals.<sup>30</sup>

Similar observations as to the complexity of fascism's elements and dynamics lead Griffin to recognise that palingenesis alone cannot indicate fascism: "Palingenetic" refers to the myth of 'rebirth' or 'regeneration' but versions of this myth are so common in the 'religious, artistic, emotional, and social imagination' that it is 'inadequate to define a political

ideology'. What's more, a version of it may be the 'affective driving force behind *all* revolutionary ideologies'.<sup>31</sup> A particular combination of forces intensifies palingenesis until it rises to the level of successful fascism. Griffin elaborates:

what all permutations of fascism have in common (i.e., the 'fascist minimum') is that their ideology, policies, and any organisations formed to implement them, are informed by a distinctive permutation of the myth that the nation needs to be, or is about to be, resurrected Phoenix-like from the forces of decadence, which, without drastic intervention by the forces of healthy nationalism, threaten to extinguish it forever.<sup>32</sup>

When palingenesis is combined with 'ultra-nationalism', they achieve a 'populist ultra-nationalism'. When the latter is combined with the 'myth of a radical crusade *against* decadence and *for* renewal in every sphere of national life', Griffin argues, the conditions for fascism are met.<sup>33</sup> The combination facilitates the development of a totalising worldview that submits the value of all peoples, places and things to the discernment of those who are empowered or, as Mussolini puts it, 'the race by which history is made'.

Though race may not be central to fascism at its core, the racism that attends the Alt-Right's medievalising reiteration of fascism should come as no surprise. Racism is such an effective tool of power consolidation that it very quickly attaches itself to the fascist project. Though neither Albright's nor Griffin's definition explicitly mentions race, one need not look too hard to see racism's constituent elements at work when Albright writes of a leader claiming to speak for a whole group at the expense of others, with whose rights he or she is unconcerned. It is not hard to see it lurking in the corners of 'ultra-nationalism'. Current Alt-Right racial ideologies are a descendant of Mussolini's, whose movement from an inward-facing pro-Italian racism towards a racism focused on the threat posed by out-groups demonstrates fascism's tendency towards racism.

### The Harlem Renaissance's Black Medievalist Answer

The Middle Ages' proximity to modernity and its cooptation as the last bastion of chivalry and 'Tradition' have contributed to its role as a contested site at which palingenetic fascism and modernist liberal democracy compete. While fascists seek to revive a dead and dying world in order to usher in a brighter future, modernists view the present moment as one that has improved upon its past; they look forward to a future of continual improvement. A distinction lay in the moment of crisis: for the fascist, the crisis is always now, when the polity must be resurrected or, to put it in the Alt-Right parlance constructed by Donald Trump's

presidential campaign, it must be 'made great again'.<sup>34</sup> For the modernist, the point of crisis is always potentiated in any event, entity or movement that would arrest human progress towards the goal—or at least what became the goal in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—of increasingly equitable national and global communities. Fascist claims of civic death and a return to the past for inspiration each represent moments of crisis for modernists who prefer to look to the past in the context of a rarely broken line of progress that has continued apace. The European Middle Ages are convenient to both of these perspectives—in the case of the fascists, as the last moment before the liberal democratic institutions so prized by modernists were empowered, and in the case of modernists, as the era which gave birth to liberal democratic ideas in their Western European iterations.

The remainder of this essay will address the contestation of the Middle Ages through the lens of a modernist literary and artistic movement that is inextricably bound with race and progress and that nonetheless deploys the Middle Ages in significant ways too rarely recognised in scholarship.

Demonstrating the modernist liberal democrat's deployment of the Middle Ages is the Harlem Renaissance, a literary and artistic moment that is certainly associated with race, was an effect of the twentieth century along with fascism, and is often associated with high modernism. The movement was early associated with literary modernism—the mode that rejected conventional generic forms in favour of experimental texts that responded to Ezra Pound's much quoted directive to 'make it new'. Jean Toomer's *Cane*, published in 1923, was lauded in 1924 as the work of:

an artist; the very first artist in his Race who, with all an artist's passion and sympathy for life, its hurts, its sympathies, its desires, its joys, its defeats, and strange yearnings, can write about the Negro without the surrender or compromise of the artist's vision.<sup>35</sup>

William Stanley Braithwaite, a prominent black American writer contemporary with the Harlem Renaissance, continued in his remarks that '*Cane* is a book of ecstasy and bronze, of dusk and flame, of ecstasy and pain, and Jean Toomer is a bright morning star of a new day of the Race in literature'.<sup>36</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr interprets these and other commentary as characterising '*Cane* as the first modernist text in the tradition'.<sup>37</sup>

That the Harlem Renaissance's modernism stands in counterpoint to fascism such as Evola's is demonstrated not so much by *Cane* as by more overtly political Harlem Renaissance writing. In the 1928 novel *Dark Princess: A Romance*, one of the movement's leading lights, sociologist and founding figure in critical race scholarship W.E.B. Du Bois uses the Middle Ages in a way that is in near complete contradistinction to



contemporary fascist deployments. The egalitarianism, liberalism and democracy that Evola so despised are on full display in *Dark Princess*, where a world coalition of darker peoples represents the world's great civilisations and bands together in order to advance the cause of non-whites around the world. Anti-colonialist and globalist, the coalition functions *internally* in an egalitarian liberal democratic manner. When coalition members consider whether African Americans are up to the task of joining their anti-colonialist efforts, the scene takes the form of a civil discussion. The Japanese representative raises the possibility of the 'ability, qualifications, and real possibilities of the black race in Africa or elsewhere'. What follows are carefully expressed opinions and rebuttals, in a parliamentary style, from the main character Matthew Towns, Princess Kautilya of Bwodpur on the Indian subcontinent, the Japanese representative, the Egyptian representative, another Indian representative and the Chinese representative.<sup>38</sup> Later in the text, when Towns' love interest Princess Kautilya disguises her royal identity, it is to do the subversive and democratic socialist work of running workers' unions in the United States. Though Matthew is the descendant of American slaves, the text ends with the union of his humble family and the princess's regal stature: he reunites with the princess on his mother's farm in rural Virginia as she presents him his infant son. The hierarchy of regal and slave 'blood' is levelled, and the distinction between wealth and poverty is collapsed. Though there are similarities to certain fascist practices—social levelling, or at least lip service towards it, and the use of some violence (Matthew participates in the thwarted bombing of a train chartered by the Ku Klux Klan)—the text presents a fully modernist political ideology in which human society trends progressively without any palingenetic need for resurrection.

Du Bois's work bolsters its political modernism by deploying medievalism. Du Bois's *Dark Princess*, despite being authored by a writer closely associated with the Harlem Renaissance and appearing only a few years after Toomer's avant-garde *Cane*, does not boast the experimental play with genre and form commonly associated with modernism. Instead, the text appears in the conventional form of a romance. Indeed, it closely tracks with the form of a medieval romance. Many medieval romances feature a protagonist whose regal identity is obscured at the beginning, and sometimes for much of a text. In the Arthurian tradition, the boy Arthur's royal identity is not exposed until he pulls the sword from the stone. In Chretien de Troyes's *Lancelot*, the title character's name is obscured from the reader, and many other characters, through more than two-thirds of the text. Similarly, Towns in *Dark Princess* is denied the medical degree by a university administration who will not allow him to register for his rotation in obstetrics because he, a black man, would have to deliver white women's babies.<sup>39</sup> Then, in the scene where he first encounters the coalition, Towns *thinks* to protest the members' doubt

about African Americans by proclaiming that ‘there’s as much high-born blood among American Negroes as among any people’. What comes out of his mouth instead is that American blacks are ‘common people’ who ‘come out of the depths—the blood and mud of battle. And from just such depths...came most of the worthwhile things in this old world’. The Japanese coalition member responds, ‘It is perhaps both true and untrue... Certainly Mr. Towns has expressed a fine and human hope, although I fear that always blood must tell’. Towns’s response:

‘No, it mustn’t,’ cried Matthew, ‘unless it is allowed to talk. Its speech is accidental today. There is some *weak, thin* stuff called blood, which not even a crown can make speak intelligently; and at the same time some of the noblest blood God ever made is dumb with chains and poverty’.<sup>40</sup>

African Americans, Towns asserts, are, like Arthur, royalty in disguise. Hidden identity, a trope characteristic of medieval romance literature, is the means in Du Bois’s novel of asserting black worth.

Medievalism also influences the dynamics of the love relationship that drive Du Bois’s modern-day chivalric romance. Medieval narratives from Chaucer’s *Clerk’s Tale* and his *Merchant’s Tale*, and from Chretien’s *Erec et Enide* to *Floris and Blancheflour* feature lovers and beloveds, sometimes husbands and wives, who are mismatched in one way or another: sometimes class (or, in medieval political theory, estate), sometimes age, sometimes level of commitment and sometimes all three. *Dark Princess*, in which Towns is more or less penniless and the princess boasts extreme wealth and power, even if her agency as a sovereign is ever more threatened by European imperialism, certainly follows the model. The trope of the Saracen princess, or sometimes the Saracen prince, in which Western European Christian figures love or are loved by eastern ‘Saracen’ (Muslims or pagans, often with darker skin) characters, features in medieval romances such as *Floris and Blancheflour*, which was one of the most popular romances in medieval Europe. The situation in *Dark Princess* is certainly similar, where Towns’s black American Christian background contrasts with the princess’s Indian subcontinental spiritual beliefs. In fact, the globalising unity that forms *Dark Princess*’s triumphant ending when Kautilya is united with Matthew’s family is only possible because the text deploys age-old romance tropes.

It is not the case that all black thinkers contemporary with Du Bois refer to the Middle Ages redemptively, but even derogatory deployments intimate the importance of the period to thought on African Americans’ place in modern America and its history. Howard University philosopher Alain Locke in his highly influential 1925 essay ‘The New Negro’ did much to set and register the intellectual agenda for the Harlem Renaissance. In it, he treats the Middle Ages in a way that departs from

Du Bois's approach: for Locke, modernity and the Middle Ages are discrete. He associates black life in the agricultural South with the Middle Ages when he identifies the 'Great Migration' of blacks from the American South to northern cities as 'in the Negro's case a deliberate flight not only from country side to city, but from *medieval* America to modern'.<sup>41</sup> Locke does not refer to 'medieval America' unthinkingly or with only simple reference to agriculture as a non-industrial and therefore *medieval* mode of life. Rather, he plays on the notion that blacks, because linked to southern agricultural society, are not as advanced as whites. Further on in the essay, Locke calls the American black the 'migrating peasant' and claims that he 'has been the peasant matrix' of the South who has contributed to that region's culture materially and 'spiritually'.<sup>42</sup> He asserts that with migration northward and 'city-ward' the Negro 'hurdle[s] several generations of expectance at a leap'.<sup>43</sup> In other words, in the Great Migration African Americans catch up to white Americans and become increasingly equal with them. The Middle Ages represent a primitive past, with which African Americans are no longer to be associated. While Du Bois presents a tale that induces the reader to understand modernity through the lens of medieval romance, Locke uses the Middle Ages to illumine modernity through stark contrast. Both approaches, as disparate as they are, offer an alternative that illumines the dynamics of fascist medievalism.

Black medievalism is a foil to fascist medievalism because the former resists palingenesis while the latter relies on and facilitates it. The erroneous notion that the Middle Ages in Europe represent a time and space that was homogeneously white underwrites Alt-Right exhortations for a 'return' to the model of a white ethnostate. This erroneous image of the white Middle Ages is exactly what Du Bois and Locke alike contradicted, though with different comportments towards the value of the Middle Ages for modernity and its racial politics. Du Bois places black characters in a modern-medieval romance and Locke positions blacks as emerging from a modern American medieval feudal society: while there is certainly a difference in approach, both present a version of the European Middle Ages where black people, as in historical reality, are present. Black deployment of the Middle Ages resists palingenesis precisely because it invalidates the racial and cultural purity on which fascist medievalist palingenesis trades. The demographics and cultures of the European Middle Ages are shown to be as diverse, complicated and subject to interpretation as are its modern descendants. When Charlottesville's Alt-Right demonstrators wielded fasces, Crusaders' crosses and the Holy Roman Imperial eagle, among other symbols, in order to assert that 'elite human beings' still have a hue, they engaged not so much in revisionist history as in historical fantasy—and in a fantasy that their fellow medievalists, *black* medievalists, long ago put to rest when they, too, used the Middle Ages to understand and improve modernity.

## Notes

- 1 Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 16.
- 2 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003), 3.
- 3 'Flags and Other Symbols Used by Far-Right Groups in Charlottesville', *Hatewatch*, 12 August 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190212104126/https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/08/12/flags-and-other-symbols-used-far-right-groups-charlottesville>, archived 12 February 2019. 'Viking symbols "stolen" by racists', *The Norwegian American*, 31 October 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180823031948/https://www.norwegianamerican.com/featured/viking-symbols-stolen-racists/>, archived 23 August 2018.
- 4 See Chapter 7 of this volume.
- 5 Paul Ratner, 'Why Some Conservative Thinkers Seriously Want the Return of the Middle Ages', *Big Think*, 5 March 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180917185348/https://bigthink.com/paul-ratner/time-to-get-medieval-why-some-conservative-thinkers-love-the-middle-ages>, archived 28 September 2018. Ratner quotes Dugin's interview in Katehon, 'Dugin: The Alternative to Liberalism Is "Returning to the Middle Ages"', *The Fourth Revolutionary War*, 18 February 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170311211646/https://4threvolutionarywar.wordpress.com/2017/02/18/dugin-the-alternative-to-liberalism-is-returning-to-the-middle-ages/>, archived 11 March 2017.
- 6 Caitlin Dickson, 'The Neo-Nazi Has No Clothes: In Search of Matt Heimbach's Bogus "White Ethnostate"', *Huffington Post*, 2 February 2018, [https://web.archive.org/web/20190208050303/https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/neo-nazi-matthew-heimbach-bogus-white-ethnostate\\_us\\_5a745c5fe4b01ce33eb1d720](https://web.archive.org/web/20190208050303/https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/neo-nazi-matthew-heimbach-bogus-white-ethnostate_us_5a745c5fe4b01ce33eb1d720), archived 8 February 2019. Jason Wilson, "'Young white guys are hopping mad": confidence grows at far-right gathering', *The Guardian*, 31 July 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190213131837/https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/31/american-renaissance-conference-white-identity>, archived 13 February 2019. Alan Feuer, 'Far Right Plans Its Next Moves with a New Energy', *New York Times*, 14 August 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181224104417/https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/us/white-supremacists-right-wing-extremists-richard-spencer.html>, archived 24 December 2018.
- 7 According to the medieval compendium of the lives of the saints in the Latin Church known as the *Legenda Aurea* or *Golden Legend*, St. Maurice was an Egyptian born in Thebes AD 250, and he led the Theban legion of the Roman army. He was martyred for refusal to worship pagan deities and for refusing to attack fellow Christians. Emperor Maximian had the entire unit killed near what is now Saint-Maurice, Switzerland. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 188–92.
- 8 Rebecca C. Redfern and Joseph T. Hefner, 'Officially Absent but Actually Present': Bioarchaeological Evidence for Population Diversity in London during the Black Death, AD 1348–50' in *Bioarchaeology of Marginalized People*, ed. Madeleine L. Mant and Alyson Jaagumägi Holland (London: Academic Press/Elsevier, 2019), 69–114, at 71, doi:10.1016/B978-0-12-815224-9.00005-1, citing I.H. Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008) and Miranda Kaufman, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: Oneworld, 2017).

- 9 Redfern and Hefner, 'Officially absent', 73.
- 10 Rebecca C. Redfern, et al., "'Written in Bone': New Discoveries about the Lives and Burials of Four Roman Londoners", *Britannia* 48 (2017): 253–77, doi:10.1017/S0068113X17000216; 'RIB 1064: Funerary Inscription for Victor' in *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, ed. R.G. Collingwood and R.P. Wright, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, repr. 1995), [https://web.archive.org/web/\\*/https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/1064](https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/1064), archived 20 August 2016. Paul H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 54–7, treats Jacopo da Verona's letters, written in the 1330s, that discuss African monks in residence at the Church of the Nativity.
- 11 As Redfern and Hefner, 'Officially absent', 72, put it, "'Saracen" and/or "Moor"' were often used 'for people from the Islamic world, many of whom had Black ancestry'.
- 12 Stephanie Downes and Helen Young, 'The Maiden Fair: Nineteenth-Century Medievalist Art and the Gendered Aesthetics of Whiteness in HBO's *Game of Thrones*', *postmedieval* 10, no. 2 (June 2019): 219–35, at 221.
- 13 Downes and Young cite Joe Feagin's concept of the 'white racial frame'. See also Jason Eastman's work on racial framing, 'white innocence', and its legal ramifications in 'The Wild (White) Ones: Comparing Frames of White and Black Deviance', *Contemporary Justice Review: Issues in Criminal, Social, and Restorative Justice* 18, no. 2 (2015): 231–47.
- 14 Roger Griffin, 'Staging the Nation's Rebirth: The Politics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies', in *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925–1945*, ed. Günter Berghaus (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996), 18.
- 15 Sarah Rankin, 'Why hate came to the progressive island of Charlottesville', *Chicago Tribune*, 18 August 2017. Archived 6 January 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181210180103/https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-why-hate-came-to-charlottesville-20170818-story.html>.
- 16 'Deconstructing the symbols and slogans spotted in Charlottesville', *Washington Post*, 18 August 2017. Archived 12 March 2019. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190312005051/https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/local/charlottesville-videos/?utm\\_term=.c71c7c436008](https://web.archive.org/web/20190312005051/https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/local/charlottesville-videos/?utm_term=.c71c7c436008).
- 17 Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 40–3.
- 18 Ibid., 56.
- 19 Ibid., 40, 54.
- 20 Ibid., 40. Recent research by Nicole Lopez-Jantzen suggests that appeals to 'lost' Roman virtues of martial ardour should be considered in the light of critical race theoretical readings of Ostrogothic political ideology in sixth-century Rome. She argues that Goths "subverted...Roman racial formation and imperialist ideology...by asserting Gothic distinction, based on martial masculinity." 'Between empires: Race and ethnicity in the early Middle Ages,' *Literature Compass* 16.9–10 (2019): e12542. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12542>, at 5.
- 21 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 53, my emphasis.
- 22 Julius Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International), 80. Also, Evola, 80, helps to explain the misogyny, or more to the point, the near total absence of

women within the Alt-Right movement: 'In a number of instances what has been said about the knight's 'woman' also applies to the 'woman' celebrated by the Ghibelline 'Love's Lieges,' which points to a uniform and precise traditional symbolism. The woman to whom a knight swears unconditional faithfulness and to whom even a crusader consecrates himself; the woman who leads to purification, whom the knight considers his reward and who will make him immortal if he ever dies for her—that woman, as it has been documented in the case of the 'Worshippers of Love' or 'Love's Lieges', is essentially a representation of 'Holy Wisdom', or a perceived embodiment, in different degrees, of the 'transcendent, divine woman' who represents the power of a transfiguring spirituality and of a life unaffected by death'.

For Evola, women inhabit the realm of spirit and are attributed only a passive agency while all the action is attributed to the males who would be knights.

23 Ibid., 85.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 'Race-Realism' is discussed as American Renaissance's *raison d'être* at <https://web.archive.org/web/20190116224515/https://www.amren.com/about/>, archived 18 February 2019.

27 Richard Spencer, 'Why Do They Hate Us?', *American Renaissance*, 8 May 2015. Archived 12 March 2019. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190312005600/https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=2518&v=3SgLSV9Mgfw](https://web.archive.org/web/20190312005600/https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2518&v=3SgLSV9Mgfw), at 40:17, my emphasis. Dugin, Evola, and Spencer's speech at the American Renaissance meeting are addressed in somewhat less depth in my *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 188–90.

28 Gillette, *Racial Theories*, 40, 54.

29 Madeleine Albright, *Fascism: A Warning* (Harper: New York, 2018), 8.

30 Ibid., 11.

31 Griffin, 'Staging the Nation's Rebirth', 13, emphasis original.

32 Ibid., 13.

33 Ibid.

34 Trump's campaign slogan is 'Make America Great Again!' It has been panned as racist by a wide range of commentators, from cultural critics writing for online outlets such as Noah Berlatsky to former US presidents such as Bill Clinton. Noah Berlatsky, 'Trump voters motivated by racism may be violating the Constitution. Can they be stopped?' *Think: Opinion, Analysis, Essays*, 17 January 2020. [www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-voters-motivated-racism-may-be-violating-constitution-can-they-ncna1110356](http://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-voters-motivated-racism-may-be-violating-constitution-can-they-ncna1110356). 'Bill Clinton Says "Make America Great Again" Is Just a Racist Dog Whistle,' *HuffPost*, n.d. [https://web.archive.org/web/20191012073903/https://www.huffpost.com/entry/bill-clinton-says-make-america-great-again-is-just-a-racist-dog-whistle\\_n\\_5b2a678ae4b0697eecbf66f3](https://web.archive.org/web/20191012073903/https://www.huffpost.com/entry/bill-clinton-says-make-america-great-again-is-just-a-racist-dog-whistle_n_5b2a678ae4b0697eecbf66f3).

35 William Stanley Braithwaite, 'The Negro in Literature', *Crisis* 28 (September 1924): 207, quoted in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the 'Racial' Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 198–9.

36 Ibid. *Cane* was inscribed in literary history as 'modernist' by 1969 when Robert Bone, preeminent mid-twentieth-century scholar and critic of black American literature, proclaimed the book's style 'modernist, and highly metaphorical'. Robert Bone, 'Cane', *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1969: 3, 34, quoted in Gates, *Figures*, 221.

- 37 Gates, 221.
- 38 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess: A Romance* (Jackson, MS: Banner Books/University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 21–3.
- 39 Ibid., 4.
- 40 Ibid., 22–3, emphasis mine.
- 41 Alain Locke, ‘The New Negro’ in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African-American Culture, 1892–1938*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Gene Andrew Jarrett (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 113–4.
- 42 Ibid., 114–8.
- 43 Ibid., 113.

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*Figure 9.1* A statue of Robert E. Lee in Emancipation Park in Charlottesville, Virginia on 14 July 2017. The site has been the target of repeated white nationalist protests. Katherine Welles/Shutterstock.com.

## 9 Getting Medieval Post-Charlottesville

### Medievalism and the Alt-Right

*Thomas Blake*

#### Misappropriated Medievalisms and Queer Asynchrony

The media framed the 2017 Alt-Right rally in Charlottesville, North Carolina as a violent race conflict erupting in the wake of public cries for the removal of a Confederate statue of Robert E. Lee in Emancipation Park. However, for American medievalists attention was focused on the many white nationalists anachronistically armed with clubs, swords and shields carrying medieval-inspired heraldry. For these protestors, nostalgia for a mythical medieval white past fuelled chants of ‘White lives matter!’ and ‘You will not replace us!’<sup>1</sup> Whereas most Americans tend to see Charlottesville and the controversy of Confederate monuments which served as its catalyst as products of Reconstruction Era and Jim Crow legislation, for medievalists the issues of racism and white supremacy undergirding the rally run much deeper. Given the climate of the field of medieval studies prior to Charlottesville, it should be no surprise that Peter Cvjetanovic, the angry young torch-bearer from University of Nevada-Reno who became the ubiquitous face of young white nationalists, drew inspiration for his Alt-Right activities from undergraduate courses in medieval studies.<sup>2</sup> And if our recent conference circuit is any indication, medieval studies has much to learn about racial awareness and inclusivity and bears a greater responsibility in spreading the myth of a monolithically white Christian European past than much of the field is willing to admit.

Recently, many medievalist collectives like Medievalists of Color have challenged the status quo of the white Middle Ages, calling for more focus on issues of race, the global and postcolonial Middle Ages, and institutional privilege at all levels of the field.<sup>3</sup> The Alt-Right has also sensed the importance of medieval studies as a battleground for American white supremacy. In the aftermath of Charlottesville, Milo Yiannopoulos and legions of Alt-Right redditors and acolytes have rallied behind some of white medieval studies’ biggest gatekeepers ensconced behind some of America’s most powerful academic institutions.<sup>4</sup> And while recent events have shown much progress within medieval studies in advancing a more global and inclusive Middle Ages, we are still largely disavowing the Alt-Right and the popular medievalism upon which it draws apotropically from safely within the academy. The laudable but incomplete solution that many have

issued in recent years is a clarion call to teach a more diverse and historically accurate Middle Ages, as if merely teaching future Richard Spencers and Peter Cvjetanovics that the real Middle Ages were more diverse will in and of itself denuclearise the Alt-Right in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter contends that a myopic focus within medieval studies on historical accuracy will not stymie the rise of the Alt-Right for two important reasons. First, this solution of educating students on the ‘real’ Middle Ages ignores the impact of popular medievalism and the fact that the Alt-Right draws from a repository of remediated medievalisms rather than the historical Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup> Medievalism does not refer to the ‘real’ Middle Ages; rather, it is adaptable and refers to fantasies about the medieval used for ideological purposes, quite often racist or political.<sup>7</sup> If popular medievalisms like *Game of Thrones* and *Vikings* present white Eurocentric medieval fantasy worlds which inspire a nostalgia for a white past that appeals to the Alt-Right, then they must also be dismantled by those trained in medieval literature, history, art and culture, that is, rather than just teaching the ‘real’ Middle Ages, we need to also teach how the Middle Ages have been misappropriated and deployed politically over and across time.<sup>8</sup> This means engaging medievalism in the classroom and in public discourse through diachronic cross-cultural encounters even though medievalisms are not historically medieval.<sup>9</sup>

Second, we must acknowledge the complicity of our own field by owning our historical role in emboldening white supremacists including those in the Alt-Right, many of whom are college students. Medieval studies is built upon some of the same racist genealogical claims that fuel Alt-Right appropriation of the medieval for white ‘heritage’, and the longer we treat our field as sterilised objective truth we lose more students to the Alt-Right and fail to act as good public scholars.<sup>10</sup> Both oversights—that Alt-Right medievalisms often refer to other medievalisms rather than the historical medieval past, and that medieval studies is itself rife with many of the same historically white Euro-centric genealogical impulses—demand a change in our practices and a reframing of our reductive tendency to approach the complexity of the role the medieval plays in the ideology of the Alt-Right. Frankly, we need to queer our approach.

The clarion call among medievalists to educate students on the historically accurate Middle Ages treats time as ‘straight’ and linear when in fact the Alt-Right draws from multiple mythical pasts to fuel its racist agendas. Alt-Right medievalisms are, as Amy Kaufman has noted, ‘retransmissions’ in that they are transmissions of transmissions of the medieval.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, many of the medieval-inspired symbols used by the Alt-Right in Charlottesville are symbols earlier misappropriated by the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>12</sup> This argument—that the Alt-Right engages in ‘retransmissions’—refers to a kind of Derridean deferral, a chain of signifiers of a white mythical medieval past that never crystallises because it never existed.<sup>13</sup> As I have suggested, medievalists will need to look to medievalisms to disrupt the Alt-Right in its efforts to co-opt the Middle

Ages. Yet, we will not be able to see the multiple versions of the medieval past without queering our own understanding of time.

Carolyn Dinshaw's work on queer time has opened up some of the ways retransmissions of medieval literature create multiple temporalities and provides a framework for queering the white nostalgia of the Alt-Right. Whereas for the Alt-Right nostalgia is 'straight' in that it lays claim to a mythical monolithically white medieval past, for Dinshaw nostalgia

is not merely a desire to return to a simpler time . . . it is an enactment of a kind of double vision, a temporal copresence. It is . . . both antimodernist (an absorption in the medieval past) and modernist (a way of being in an accommodating to the present day) at once.<sup>14</sup>

While Dinshaw applies this 'temporal copresence' to the relationship between historical medieval texts and their later antiquarian postmedieval readers, she does leave space for queer nostalgia to accommodate 'heterogeneous temporalities' and 'many possible pasts', including the medieval past imagined by the Alt-Right.<sup>15</sup> After the aggregated anachronisms witnessed in Charlottesville, Dinshaw's work on time is crucial to more impactful public scholarship and understanding of why focusing on the 'real' Middle Ages without attention to misappropriated medievalisms will not succeed in disrupting the momentum of the Alt-Right. Dinshaw locates nostalgia at a place where temporal planes collide (multiple possible pasts and present) and time is asynchronous rather than linear and 'straight'. Charlottesville, where American medievalisms collided with medieval studies and present-day America, was just one of those moments of asynchrony, and medieval scholars are still trying to set the record straight.

The next part of the essay will explore how a queer asynchronous approach to teaching the late medieval miscegenation romance, Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, alongside Daenerys and Khal Drogo's narrative arc in *Game of Thrones* can open up medievalist engagement with popular culture to sustained raced critiques which complicate linear and flat readings of gender not only in parallel tales of white imperial women but also in our local communities and in the controversy which started this essay: Confederate monuments, themselves bound up in the politics of whiteness, gender and racial violence. I cover three examples (*Game of Thrones*, Chaucer and a local 1930 lynching) to illustrate how medievalism operates queerly—indeed, spreads rizomatically rather than linearly—through all three and to demonstrate the ways in which diachronic cross-cultural comparisons, particularly those engaging popular and American medievalisms, are absolutely essential to dismantling the Alt-Right on our campuses and in our fields. The essay will then return to the historically complicit role medieval studies has played in emboldening white supremacists and the need to engage publicly with popular medievalisms in tandem with teaching a more inclusive Middle Ages to keep the field safe from Alt-Right misappropriation.

### Colonialism and Racial Violence from Chaucer to *Game of Thrones*

At the New Chaucer Society Congress in Toronto this summer, one paper in a session on medieval and modern misogynies engaged with the generally disregarded subfield of popular medievalism. Turning to the popular HBO series, *Game of Thrones*, the speaker discussed the rape of the newly married supernaturally white princess Daenerys by the bronze-skinned Mongol-inspired Khal Drogo. The speaker compared Daenerys' story to a medieval hagiography: like many chaste female saints, Daenerys is repeatedly subjected to sexualised violence. Surprisingly, the speaker also argued that Drogo goes unpunished for acts of sexual violence. What this reading ignores is the critical role race plays in the colonisation narrative in which Drogo too is victim, a narrative skillfully masked over with the white feminist narrative of Daenerys' progress from pawn to ruler.<sup>16</sup> Drogo, after all, suffers a medieval fantasy re-imagining of the murder of countless men of colour in colonial rape fantasies, burned as a sacrificial victim to the altar of white femininity, dead in pursuit of Daenerys's imperial ambition.<sup>17</sup> His body, along with that of Mirri Maz Duur, the woman of colour who poisoned Drogo to protect the Essosi, burns in the conflagration that births Dany's dragons, one of whom is named Drogon after him just to make it absolutely clear that she has subsumed his identity in her colonisation of his people. Martin and his heroine justify this cultural erasure by characterising the colonised people as hyperviolent and hypersexual.<sup>18</sup> White knight Ser Jorah Mormont's colonial moralising narration of the copper-skinned Dothraki helped endear white viewers to Daenerys as a fan favourite as he justified her racialised violence: '[the Dothraki] do not understand sin or shame as we do'.<sup>19</sup>

Medievalists willing to admit a fascination with *Game of Thrones* and Martin's novels may see asynchronous eerie connections between the Daenerys and Drogo colonial narrative arc and Geoffrey Chaucer's late fourteenth-century canonical colonial tale of hagiographical bloodshed, the *Man of Law's Tale*. Set in Christian Rome and Muslim Syria, the first half of the tale centres on the threat of miscegenation and the pollution of its central white heroine, princess Custance, by the Sultan of Syria, a Muslim man of colour characterised by hypersexuality: when he hears of her beauty, 'al his lust' is ignited.<sup>20</sup> The logic of Custance's colonial project, much like Daenerys' repurposing of the Dothraki, depends on a calculated rhetoric of victimhood to inspire pity and adulation in the text's white readers. In her own words a 'wrecche womman . . . born to thralldom and penance' bartered to the Sultan of Syria by her father for the imperial project of 'destruccioun of mawmettrie/ And in encrees of Cristes lawe deere' (destruction of idolatry and for spreading Christianity), Custance by the end of the tale leaves Syria as the sole survivor

of a murderous feast ending with the Sultan and his retinue stabbed to death and the Muslim Syrians burned to death and slaughtered in retribution, crossing 'oure ocean' to take her own Iron Throne in Northumbria.<sup>21</sup> The Sultanness, Chaucer's own Mirri Maz Duur figure who protects indigenous culture and native religion against the colonising Romans, kills the Sultan before Custance can destroy Syrian civilisation from the inside, much as Mirri Maz Duur poisons Drogo to prevent the mass slaughter of Essosi peoples for the purpose of Daenerys' Westerosi war for the Iron Throne. However, much like Mirri, the Sultanness ultimately fails to protect her culture as the Romans eradicate Muslim Syria in retribution.

In addition, Custance, like Daenerys arisen from the embers of the colonised, emerges as the innocent ashen victim, another 'pale face', as Chaucer encourages his audience to envision her '[w]ithouten gilt' or, in the words of Custance herself as she prays theatrically and plaintively at her trial, 'Susanne' free '[f]ro false blame'.<sup>22</sup> We are encouraged by both Chaucer and Custance herself to envision her as a biblical victim of a sexual assault that does not happen, a victim free from blame even when she is the colonial agent and orchestrator of immeasurable violence around her, calculated to ensure the eradication of Islam and the success of Christianity.<sup>23</sup> By the tale's conclusion Syria, like Essos, has been constructed as a place consumed by lust (here the Sultan's) and violence (via the Sultanness's murder plot), circumstances that retroactively justify its colonisation by the Romans. By Chaucer's sleight of hand and his heroine's rhetoric of victimisation, Custance is blameless even as the trail of blood leads tellingly from her white body. Pairing the *Man of Law's Tale* with Daenerys's narrative opens up for students' productive moments of queer asynchrony, as placing medieval fantasy novel from 1996 in dialogue with the late fourteenth-century romance brings into relief the violence masked over by colonial white women like Daenerys and Empress Custance and the white male authors who strategically employ them in the service of white supremacy. The imaginary pre-Christianised Northumbria Chaucer imagines as ancestor to fourteenth-century England, like medieval-inspired Westeros and Essos, is whitewashed, anachronistically Christianised with the Syrian Muslim threat slain and burned in conflagration. Just as medieval readers were encouraged to myopically focus on Custance's white victimhood and status as Christian mother rather than genocide and racial purging, fans of *Game of Thrones* overlook the eerily white Daenerys' atrocities and penchant for burning the copper-skinned Dothraki khals and rally around her role as Mother of Dragons. Fans' recent shock at Daenerys' unhinged violence in the final season, redirected towards white denizens of Westeros rather than the dismissed genocide of Essosi peoples of colour, evinces the enduring effectiveness of this rhetoric in white supremacist cultures, whether medieval or modern. The asynchronous



juxtaposition of medieval genocidal hagiographical romance with modern colonial medieval fantasy exposes for modern readers and viewers otherwise smitten with Daenerys' narrative of feminist empowerment a narrative which masterfully deploys white women and burns colonised people of colour from the white fantasy imaginary through racial violence and wish fulfilment.

### **Sham Chivalries: American Medievalism and Confederate Monuments**

My final example fuses the narrative of an imperilled white woman and the man of colour who dies because of her to a more local and historical register of 'southern chivalry' and racial rape fantasy. Too few of the students who attend Austin College in Sherman, Texas know of the 1930 Sherman lynching of George Hughes amid a period of lynchings fuelled by embittered Southerners who imagined themselves as medieval knights enacting a kind of aristocratic chivalry that excused race crimes on the altar of white femininity. On 3 May 1930, a white farmer's wife in Sherman falsely alleged that a 41-year-old black man named George Hughes had assaulted her, leading to his arraignment and trial on 9 May. That Tuesday, a group of local white men from Sherman and the surrounding area converged on the courthouse and demanded Hughes be given over to them.

The event made the *New York Times* when the Texas Rangers and National Guard were dispatched to reign in the situation and prevent a mob attack, which failed that Friday when the alleged victim, like the accused Custance at her trial summoning Susanna or Daenerys emerging dramatically from the ashes of her husband, theatrically had herself carried on a stretcher from an ambulance into the courtroom where she screamed at the sight of Hughes, inciting the crowd to riot and throw bricks through the courthouse and set the building on fire. Hughes was relocated to the vault and died of asphyxiation from the fire. The angry white mob fought Rangers and the Guard, blowing up the vault and removing Hughes' body which was then dragged through the black neighbourhoods of Sherman, hanged and set aflame in front of a hotel near Union Station, sacrificed and burned at the altar of white supremacy under the guise of protecting complicit colonial white women, a depression era spectacle steeped in Ku Klux Klan medievalism which signalled, like the recent medievalism in Charlottesville, 'You will not replace us!'<sup>24</sup>

While this story is disconnected in time and place from the previous two anecdotes, it is very intimately tied to the project of medievalism in service of white supremacy that we have seen in the two previous examples. American Southerners, both antebellum and postbellum, found inspiration in the medieval period, drawing on knighthood, chivalry and a feigned genealogy tying white Americans to medieval and feudal Europe

to justify the enslavement and mistreatment of black people.<sup>25</sup> Enamoured with late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medievalism, itself a romanticising and whitewashing of the Middle Ages, Southern white slave owners imagined themselves as feudal knights, importing mass copies of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820) as well as American retransmitted medievalisms. Robert E. Lee, subject of the Confederate statue around which Charlottesville's 'Unite the Right' rally congregated, believed in this genealogical descent from Anglo-Norman knights of the Middle Ages espoused in *Ivanhoe*. According to his biographer Douglas Freeman, Lee claimed he 'had in his veins the blood of conquerors, crusaders, and cavaliers'.<sup>26</sup>

Such retransmitted medievalisms exacerbated the treatment of black people under the guise of protecting white women from sexual assault. Mark Twain lamented *Ivanhoe*'s popularity as he saw more and more Southerners using the novel, a romanticised account of the life of the medieval King Richard the Lionheart, to justify slavery. He blamed it for the American Civil War in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), claiming that it relied on 'sham chivalries' to inculcate 'reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them'.<sup>27</sup> Mary Dockray-Miller similarly explains that nineteenth-century Southerners 'defin[ed] a distinctly Southern form of "chivalry"' based on 'an idealized, implicitly white Southern womanhood'.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, when novelist Thomas Dixon Jr's white protagonist Ben Cameron of *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) and its filmic adaptation D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) gathers a force of white men under an 'Institution of Chivalry' to defend 'this fair Christian Southland' and 'our sisters, wives, and daughters' who 'are prisoners of danger and fear' from the black man, illogically cast in this anachronistic crusading narrative as 'the heathen', he is borrowing from an established American tradition of misappropriating medievalism to promulgate white heritage.<sup>29</sup>

In the George Hughes story, American misappropriation of the Middle Ages remains entombed in the only object to survive the conflagration, an object which perfectly encapsulates the multiple temporalities converging on the event of his death: the Sherman Confederate monument. Erected in 1896 during the Jim Crow era and funded by the local Dixie chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy, the base of the tapering monument contains an epitaph steeped in medievalism:

Sacred to the memory of our Confederate dead, true patriots. They fought for home and country, for the *holy principles* of self government—the only true liberty. Their sublime self sacrifices and *unsurpassed valor* will teach future generations the lesson of *high born patriotism*, of devotion to duty, of *exalted courage*, of *southern chivalry*.

[my emphasis]

Read in the context of American medievalism and white supremacy with which it was intertwined, the Sherman monument epitaph imagines Confederate soldiers as valorous knights possessing ‘unsurpassed valor’ and ‘exalted courage’ whose dedication to protecting white women like the Daughters of the Confederacy—themselves active supporters of the Klan and the cult of southern white femininity—constituted ‘southern chivalry’ and justified slavery and racial hierarchy, values entombed when the Confederacy lost the Civil War.<sup>30</sup> The epitaph emphasises ‘high born patriotism’, a seemingly benign phrase that nonetheless references the very alignment with medieval aristocracy that assuaged the consciences of nineteenth-century Southern slave owners who used imagined ties to a white and aristocratic medieval past to justify the abuse and enslavement of black people in their own recreation of a medieval feudal system. The monument itself perversely enacts a queer nostalgia, a ‘temporal copresence’ evinced in the anachronism of ‘southern chivalry’ between imagined mythical past and postmedieval postlapsarian present. While teaching a racially complicated text like the *Man of Law’s Tale*, especially in a more globally conscious medieval literature course, can ameliorate the oppressive whiteness in some of our pedagogical practices, it will not be enough to engage students without more public engagement with public medievalisms. As a professor in Sherman, Texas, the spectre of southern medievalism looming in the town square and the horrific murder of George Hughes it helped articulate serve as part of my public scholarship, and the intentional framing in my courses of *Game of Thrones*, the *Man of Law’s Tale* and the George Hughes account form a queer asynchronous constellation much greater than the sum of its linear parts. Teaching such queer constellations of texts opens up past and present for meaningful critique—in this case anti-racist critique—that goes far beyond the practice of teaching students about the ‘real’ Middle Ages.<sup>31</sup>

### Anglo-Saxonism and the Complicity of Medieval Studies

One might be forgiven for assuming that medieval studies itself developed far removed from the virulently racist popular medievalism captivating the minds of Americans from the Civil War into the twentieth-century just described. However, the truth is that medieval studies was born with the same genealogical project of white European heritage starkly in mind.<sup>32</sup> Medieval studies and Anglo-Saxonism derived from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philology, which was just as much about constructing a ‘science’ of white supremacy through language as it was about the study of languages.<sup>33</sup> Anglo-Saxonism was particularly popular in both the United Kingdom and the United States, where ‘particularly in its philological form’, it ‘allowed Whites on both sides of the Atlantic... to claim racial superiority over all other peoples of the world’.<sup>34</sup> British and American philology stems from the German schools, where philologists like Jacob Grimm devised a ‘science’ for organising language along

cultural and genealogical lines.<sup>35</sup> Philology organised languages into convenient ethnic groupings that generally coincided with Enlightenment race texts like Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1738), which divided the world into artificial races and stressed white Europeans' physical and cultural superiority.<sup>36</sup> It is no coincidence that modern philology's entanglement with race 'science' enthralled a generation which included not only philologists like John Mitchell Kemble and Benjamin Thorpe but also novelists like Sir Walter Scott.<sup>37</sup> In her study of queer time, Carolyn Dinshaw nods to the Anglo-Saxonism inherent in the history of philology when discussing of Victorian founder of the Early English Texts Society (1864) and Chaucer Society (1868), Frederick James Furnivall, who 'sought to connect Englanders to their past, to their "forefathers", and, looking across the Atlantic, to connect "the Chaucer-lovers of the Old Country and the New"'.<sup>38</sup> Thomas Jefferson, one of the founders of Charlottesville, also bought into wholesale the Anglo-Saxonism which pervaded American medievalisms and contaminated medieval studies. He was an avid proponent of Anglo-Saxon studies at the University of Virginia having both read the work of Anglo-Saxon philologists like J. Bosworth and written on the Anglo-Saxon curriculum and its importance to 'heritage'.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, evidence of the oppressive legacy of this history can be seen just in the last few years' conference circuit, which has managed to repeatedly exclude scholars of colour, often ironically in panels and conferences purportedly organised around topics like postcoloniality, alterity and race.<sup>40</sup>

The solution already underway in pockets of medieval studies is a good one, but a partial one, and involves teaching the Middle Ages responsibly, that is, with an awareness of the true ethnic, religious, racial, sexual and gender diversity of the actual medieval period. To date, 29 medieval studies organisations have signed the 'Medievalists Respond to Charlottesville' statement, decrying white supremacists' appropriation of the Middle Ages and promoting a more global, multicultural and accurate portrayal of the period to combat racism in the academy.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, only by refusing to whitewash and romanticise the past, whether it be the American Civil War or the Middle Ages, can we begin to dismantle the spectres of white supremacy and white nationalism in this country.

However, while this might deter some from joining the ranks of the Alt-Right, the approach is rather linear and 'straight', as if by simply disentangling the line from past to present those other romanticised pasts will evaporate. This essay's queer and asynchronous look at just a few historical and literary moments of collision—Charlottesville, with its motley assortment of medieval emblems out of time and place; and the stories of Daenerys, Custance and the Sherman farmer's wife, all white women complicit in a narrative of white nationalism that mobilises violence against people of colour on the mechanism of white women's victimhood—disturbs the Alt-Right's linear attempt at nostalgia, revealing

the act to be more and more like what Dinshaw conceives of as a 'double vision', a multiplicity of pasts based not in reality but in racist fantasy.

### **Queering the Past, Querying the Present**

To continue to disrupt the nostalgic project of the Alt-Right, we need to engage more publicly, and with popular medievalism and thus with alternate temporalities and retransmissions of the medieval, to effect a maximum political impact and counteract the appropriation of the Middle Ages for the Alt-Right. As D.W. Griffith gleefully predicted of medievalism, albeit wrongly with regard to 'truth', with the impact of his white nationalist film *Birth of Nation*, '[t]he motion picture can impress upon a people as much of the truth of history in an evening as many months of study will accomplish'.<sup>42</sup> We cannot pretend, like the University of Chicago where the neo-Gothic Bartlett Gymnasium contains the crowning of Ivanhoe and where Frank Wakeley Gunsaulus announced a little over a century ago that American society 'longs for knightly devotion to what often seem lost causes in politics, society, church, and state', and where now, a century later, Richard Spencer worked on a master's thesis in the humanities on Wagner and German nationalism and where Rachel Fulton Brown is now safely ensconced and continues to threaten and amass the Alt-Right against medievalists of colour, that there is an option to be neutral.<sup>43</sup> The Dorothy Kims of medieval studies should not have to be shouting this message repeatedly to multitudes of white professors who have the privilege and gall to act like neutrality does not amount to complicity. And as Kim has elaborated so much more succinctly and powerfully, 'Neutrality is not optional'.<sup>44</sup> Essays by other medievalists of colour like Sierra Lomuto have addressed the tendency of white medievalists to hone in on historical accuracy as a product of privilege and suggested alternatives that fully integrate anti-racist critiques.<sup>45</sup> Clearly, in entering the public debate over misappropriation of the medieval, we will need to move beyond the 'real' Middle Ages.

We need to queer the false line the Alt-Right is trying to draw between a mythical white past and the present, and we do that not just by setting the historical record 'straight', but by queering the timeline and engaging with multiple temporalities.<sup>46</sup> In 2015, Richard Utz prophetically urged medievalists not to engage with popular medievalism to intervene with the Alt-Right's disturbing misappropriation of the medieval in his aptly titled 'Don't Be Snobs, Medievalists', and that advice is just as relevant now as it was then.<sup>47</sup> We cannot, for example, expect every student to care about the intersections of race and gender in a fourteenth-century miscegenation romance between a coldly emblematic white Roman princess and a lecherous Syrian Sultan when we cannot do the legwork to engage them with the modern medieval fantasy romance of white Daenerys Stormborn Targaryen and Khal Drogo, a problematic romance with

which many of them are already familiar. Through connecting these stories together and pairing them with even more disturbing narratives, like the local history of the lynching of George Hughes which looms over the town of Sherman and its racially divided populace, we produce students who are less likely to succumb to the medievalism peddled by the Alt-Right who continue to borrow from the treasure trove of medievalisms our field is complicit in providing for centuries. We cannot, in Kim's words, opt for 'neutral'.

## Notes

- 1 The Southern Poverty Law Center has assembled a useful guide for symbols and banners used by Alt-Right and other white supremacist hate groups. Hatewatch Staff, 'Flags and Other Symbols Used By Far-Right Groups in Charlottesville', *Southern Poverty Law Center*, archived 31 August 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831181141/https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/08/12/flags-and-other-symbols-used-far-right-groups-charlottesville>. Twitter user and medievalist of colour @medievalpoc exposed the Alt-Right's inaccurate use of the historical banner of the medieval venerated black Theban St. Maurice for a white supremacist rally. Medievalpoc, *Twitter Post*, archived 31 August 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831180152/https://twitter.com/medievalpoc/status/897125882988462080?lang=en>.
- 2 As Marcia Chatelain notes, 'the learned racist can be the most dangerous one'. Many of the Alt-Right at the 'Unite the Right' rally were university students. 'How Universities Embolden White Nationalists', *The Chronicle*, 17 August 2017. Archived 1 September 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170901173353/http://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Universities-Embolden/240956>. For the Twitter thread with University of Nevada Reno students discussing Cvjetanovic's racism in medieval history classes, see Bailey M. Gamberg, *Twitter Post*, 12 August 2017, 11:43 AM. Archived 31 August 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831180902/https://twitter.com/baymontana/status/896442120508026880>.
- 3 See, for example, Nell Gluckman, 'Medieval Scholars Call for Transparency and Anti-Racism at Conference', *The Chronicle*, 12 July 2018. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831181429/https://www.chronicle.com/article/Medieval-Scholars-Call-for/243919>; and Seeta Chaganti, 'Statement Regarding ICMS Kalamazoo', *Medievalists of Color*, 9 July 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831181529/http://medievalistsofcolor.com/uncategorized/statement-regarding-icms-kalamazoo/>; and, though not recommended for its 'both sides' rhetoric, Nell Gluckman, 'A Debate About White Supremacy and Medieval Studies Exposes Deep Rifts in the Field', *The Chronicle*, 18 September 2017. Archived 19 September 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170919050212/http://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Debate-About-White-Supremacy/241234>.
- 4 I am referring to University of Chicago medievalist and Alt-Right apologist Rachel Fulton Brown's now infamous bullying and doxing of junior medievalist of colour Dorothy Kim. For a succinct overview, see Bryan William Van Norden, 'What's With Nazis and Knights?', *The Huffington Post*, 19 September 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. [https://web.archive.org/web/20180831181719/https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/whats-with-nazis-and-knights\\_us\\_59c0b469e4b082fd4205b98d](https://web.archive.org/web/20180831181719/https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/whats-with-nazis-and-knights_us_59c0b469e4b082fd4205b98d). For some of the original posts, see Rachel Fulton Brown, 'Talking Points: Three Cheers for White Men', *Fencing Bear*

- At Prayer, 5 June 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831182028/https://fencingbearatprayer.blogspot.com/2015/06/talking-points-three-cheers-for-white.html>; Rio Fernandes, 'Prominent Medieval Scholar's Blog on 'Feminist Fog' Sparks an Uproar', *The Chronicle*, 22 January 2016. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831181320/https://www.chronicle.com/article/Prominent-Medieval-Scholar-s/235014>; Dorothy Kim 'Antifeminism, Whiteness, and Medieval Studies', *In the Medieval Middle*, 'The Maiden Fair: Nineteenth-Century Medievalist Art and the Gendered Aesthetics of Whiteness in HBO's *Game of Thrones*', 16 January 2016. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831182139/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/01/antifeminism-whiteness-and-medieval.html>; and Milo Yiannopoulos, 'Middle Rages: Why the Battle for Medieval Studies Matters to America', *Dangerous*, 1 August 2018. Archived 1 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831182301/https://www.dangerous.com/45111/middle-rages/>.
- 5 Several medievalists have rightly called for teaching a more inclusive and accurate Middle Ages as a way to combat the Alt-Right. Among others, Sierra Lomuto, 'White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies', *In the Medieval Middle*, 5 December 2016. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831182433/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/12/white-nationalism-and-ethics-of.html>; and David M. Perry, 'White Supremacists Love Vikings. But They've Got History All Wrong', *The Washington Post*, 31 May 2017. Archived 1 June 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170601041538/https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/05/31/white-supremacists-love-vikings-but-theyve-got-history-all-wrong/>. Lomuto stands out in more recently incisively critiquing medieval scholarship focusing on historical accuracy as 'missing the rigor of anti-racist critique', 'Public Medievalism and the Rigor of Anti-Racist Critique', *In the Medieval Middle*, 4 April 2019. Archived 5 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190805214250/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2019/04/public-medievalism-and-rigor-of-anti.html>.
  - 6 Helen Young is one of the few medievalists to speak directly of the dangers of focusing on historical 'accuracy' as a solution to the Alt-Right problem and suggests a more public scholarship engaged with popular medievalism. 'Re-Making the Real Middle Ages', *In the Medieval Middle*, 21 August 2014. Archived 25 February 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180225201204/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com:80/2014/08/re-making-real-middle-ages.html>. See also Andrew Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics, and Mass Media; Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 56.
  - 7 Josephine Livingstone defined medievalism in Charlottesville as a 'racialized medievalism' set in 'an imaginary past that bears little resemblance to the real one'. 'Racism, Medievalism, and the White Supremacy of Charlottesville', *The New Republic*, 15 August 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/144320/racism-medievalism-white-supremacists-charlottesville>. Louise D'Arcens observes that medievalism 'discloses as much, or indeed in many cases more, about the time and place in which it has been produced as it does about medieval Europe'. Louise D'Arcens, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 6.
  - 8 Andrew Elliott refers to this sort of medievalism as 'banal medievalism', which involves 'an act of half-remembering but also of half-forgetting' and can insidiously 'mask politically sensitive, ideologically perverse or odious ideas under the guise of ostensibly innocuous banality'. *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media*, 16–17.

- 9 The term 'diachronic cross-cultural encounters' as a pedagogical approach was first suggested in Karina F. Attar and Lynn Shutters, eds., *Teaching Medieval and Early Modern Cross-Cultural Encounters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- 10 This is the kind of critical intervention—pedagogical, professional, and public—that medievalist Helen Young has promoted frequently in her work on habits of whiteness in medieval fantasy. 'Re-making the Real Middle Ages'. The proliferation of the elder futhark 'odal' rune, commonly interpreted as 'heritage' by the Alt-Right, at Charlottesville exemplifies this type of appropriation.
- 11 Amy Kaufman, 'Medieval Unmoored', in *Studies in Medievalism XIX: Defining Neomedievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 1.
- 12 See Amy Kaufman, 'The Birth of a National Disgrace: Medievalism and the KKK', *The Public Medievalist*, 21 November 2017. Archived 22 July 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180722043011/https://www.publicmedievalist.com/birth-national-disgrace/>.
- 13 Andrew Elliott has similarly imagined 'retransmissions' of medievalisms in Derridean terms, concluding '[w]hat makes these signifiers empty . . . is not the lack of historical references . . . but the multiple meanings of their retransmission'. *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media*, 3, 24.
- 14 Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 64.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 16 For discussion of Daenerys as a white coloniser, see Aamer Rahman, 'Daenerys' Whole Storyline on Game of Thrones Is Messed Up', *io9*, 13 June 2013. Archived 18 December 2015. <https://web.archive.org/web/20151218013925/http://io9.gizmodo.com:80/daenerys-whole-storyline-on-game-of-thrones-is-messed-513189766>; and Shane Thomas, 'Daenerys Targaryen Is Back to 'Save the Coloureds'', *Media Diversified*, Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831193725/https://mediadiversified.org/2014/04/05/daenerys-targaryen-is-back-to-save-the-coloureds-tour-de-game-of-thrones-2014/>.
- 17 *Game of Thrones* is quite popular with the Alt-Right for its lionisation of white characters. See, for example, Emma Grey Ellis, 'Red Pilled: My Bizarre Week Using the Alt-Right's Vision of the Internet', *Wired*, 27 September 2017. Archived 6 September 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180810054529/https://www.wired.com/story/alt-tech-social-media/>; and Mack Lamoureux, 'How This 'Game of Thrones' Blogger Made His Way into the White House', *Vice*, 17 May 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. [https://web.archive.org/web/20180831190146/https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/nz85kg/how-this-game-of-thrones-blogger-made-his-way-into-the-white-house](https://web.archive.org/web/20180831190146/https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/nz85kg/how-this-game-of-thrones-blogger-made-his-way-into-the-white-house).
- 18 See, for example, Saladin Ahmed, who comments that HBO has exaggerated the violence and sexuality of the Dothraki 'into racial caricature'. 'Is Game of Thrones Too White?' *Salon*, 1 April 2012. Archived 31 August 2018. [https://web.archive.org/web/20180831190307/https://www.salon.com/2012/04/01/is\\_game\\_of\\_thrones\\_too\\_white/](https://web.archive.org/web/20180831190307/https://www.salon.com/2012/04/01/is_game_of_thrones_too_white/).
- 19 George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 102.
- 20 Geoffrey Chaucer, -1400, *Man of Law's Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry Benson, Robert Pratt and F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), l.188.
- 21 *Ibid.*, l.285–6, 236–7.
- 22 Chaucer, *Man of Law's Tale*, l.639.



- 23 For a discussion of Custance's rhetoric of victimhood, see Robert B. Dawson, 'Custance in Context: Rethinking the Protagonist in the *Man of Law's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review* 26, no. 3 (1992): 293–307, who notes a 'sinister' intelligence to her positioning. As an example of important newer work discussing Custance as a figure resisting rape and sexual assault, see Brendan O'Connell, 'Struglyng Wel and Myghtily': Resisting Rape in the *Man of Law's Tale*', *Medium Ævum* 84, no. 1 (2015): 16–39. The New Chaucer Society Congress recently devoted a panel the topic of 'Chaucer and Rape' in which Custance's resisting rape was also discussed by Nicole Nolan Sidhu in a paper titled 'Sexual Assault and Religious Difference in the *Man of Law's Tale*'.
- 24 For original reports of the riot and lynching, see Edward H. Phillips, 'The Sherman Courthouse Riot of 1930', *East Texas Historical Journal* 25, no. 2 (1987): 12–19; and 'Troops Fire on Texas Mob, Wounding Two in Battle After Burning of Negro', *New York Times*, 9 May 1930.
- 25 Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century retransmissions of the medieval period like Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) and Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Chivalry* (1858) enjoyed immense popularity in twentieth-century America, and American authors like Edgar Allen Poe, Edith Wharton, Mark Twain, Henry Adams, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway took up retransmitted medieval topics in their works. Kim Moreland, *The Medievalist Impulse in American Literature: Twain, Adams, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 21.
- 26 Douglass S. Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*. Vol. 1 (New York: Scribners, 1934), 160; Moreland, *The Medievalist Impulse*, 5.
- 27 Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874), 347.
- 28 Mary Dockray-Miller, 'Old English Has a Serious Image Problem', *JSTOR Daily*, 3 May 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831190939/https://daily.jstor.org/old-english-serious-image-problem/>.
- 29 For a discussion of *The Clansman* and its medieval impulses, see Amy Kaufman, 'The Birth of a National Disgrace'.
- 30 Ritchie Devon Watson, *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 237.
- 31 I am by no means the only medievalist to do so. See e.g. Seeta Chaganti, who pairs Chaucer's *The House of Fame* and its treatment of monuments and memorial artefacts with recent controversies over Confederate monuments. 'B-Sides: Chaucer's 'The House of Fame'', *Public Books*, 4 February 2019. Archived 5 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190805214603/https://www.publicbooks.org/b-sides-chaucers-the-house-of-fame/>.
- 32 Young charges that 'the big white elephant in the corner of the classroom and at the back of the conference venue [is] how much that fantasy of the white, Christian Middle Ages as it is currently expressed in popular culture derives from the medievalisms of nineteenth-century constructions of ethno-national identities, both within Europe and outside it, and the place of the academy in creating and perpetuating them'. 'Re-making The Real Middle Ages'. See also Dorothy Kim, who contends that 'medieval studies is intimately entwined with white supremacy and has been so for a long time'. 'Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy', *In the Medieval Middle*, 28 August 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831192705/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/teaching-medieval-studies-in-time-of.html>.

- 33 Hans Bertens, *The Basics: Literary Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 9–10.
- 34 Helen Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 21.
- 35 See e.g. Haruko Momma, *From Philology to English Studies: Language and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 75.
- 36 Both Helen Young and Mary Dockray-Miller connect the legitimization of Anglo-Saxon studies with white supremacist Enlightenment race theory. Helen Young, 'Where Do the "White Middle Ages" Come From?', *The Public Medievalist*, 21 March 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831192503/https://www.publicmedievalist.com/white-middle-ages-come/>; Mary Dockray-Miller, 'Old English Has a Serious Image Problem'. See also Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 2, 92.
- 37 Momma, *From Philology to English Studies*, 101, 152.
- 38 Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?*, 24, 26; Ruth Evans, 'The Chaucer Society, Victorian Medievalism, and the Nation-State: Englishness and Empire', *The New Chaucer Society Blog*, 4 March 2018. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831192357/http://newchaucersociety.org/blog/entry/exhuming-the-giant>.
- 39 Late eighteenth-century English philologists focused heavily on Old and Middle English because medieval literature conveniently tied the British to Roman descent through mythistorical texts like *History of the Kings of Britain*. Helen Young, 'Where Do the "White Middle Ages" Come From?'; Momma, *From Philology to English Studies*, 70–71. See also Thomas Jefferson, *An Essay towards Facilitating Instruction in the Anglo-Saxon and Modern Dialects of the English Language* (New York: John F. Trow, 1851).
- 40 The International Medieval Congress in Leeds in July 2017 drew criticism for panels on 'otherness' which excluded medievalists and early modernists of colour. J. Clara Chan, 'Medievalists, Recoiling from White Supremacy, Try to Diversify the Field', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 15 June 2017. Archived 3 February 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180203193738/https://www.chronicle.com/article/Medievalists-Recoiling-From/240666>; Ayanna Thompson, 'Otherness' at IMC in Leeds: An Open Letter', *ipetitions*, 1 August 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831193100/https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/imc-otherness>. Adam Miyashiro exposed the ubiquitously white International Society of Anglo-Saxonists conference in Honolulu in late July and early August 2017 for practicing 'erasure of the native' in a conference ironically titled 'Global Perspectives'. 'Decolonizing Anglo-Saxon Studies: A Response to ISAS in Honolulu'. *In the Medieval Middle*, 29 July 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831193202/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/07/decolonizing-anglo-saxon-studies.html>. Most recently, several medieval collectives critiqued the International Congress of Medieval Studies for its lack of inclusion and transparency when it rejected a disproportionate number of proposals for 2019 dealing with race, the global Middle Ages and public scholarship. 'Kalamazoo ICMS – two letters, and asking for your support', *In the Medieval Middle*, 14 July 2018. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831193310/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2018/07/kalamazoo-icms-two-letters-and-asking.html>.
- 41 'Medievalists Respond to Charlottesville', 18 August 2017. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831193356/http://www.themedievalacademyblog.org/medievalists-respond-to-charlottesville/>.

- 42 A. Johns-Putra, *The History of the Epic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 195.
- 43 For an excellent discussion of the American Gothic revival style as a form of medievalism, see Moreland, *The Medievalist Impulse*, 3, 7, and Jean F. Block, ed., *The Uses of Gothic: Planning and Building the Campus of the University of Chicago 1892–1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 110.
- 44 Kim, adamant that the Alt-Right is recruiting college students, argues that ‘medievalists have to understand that the public and our students will see us as potential white supremacists or white supremacist sympathizers because we are medievalists’ and suggests ‘overt signaling of how [we] are not’ white supremacists and ‘how [our] medieval studies is one that does not uphold white supremacy’. ‘Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy’.
- 45 Sierra Lomuto, ‘Public Medievalism and the Rigor of Anti-Racist Critique’, *In the Medieval Middle*, 4 April 2019. Archived 5 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190805214250/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2019/04/public-medievalism-and-rigor-of-anti.html>.
- 46 Karl Steel places heritage in precisely this context, arguing ‘[t]o say something has heritage is to place it outside argument. It can’t be reasoned with; it must be respected. Its existence is its own argument. And its existence is an existence across time that erases time as a succession of differences’. ‘Bad Heritage, Immediacy, and Vikings’, *In the Medieval Middle*, 13 August 2014. Archived 31 August 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180831193600/http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2014/08/bad-heritage-immediacy-and-vikings.html>.
- 47 Richard Utz, ‘Don’t Be Snobs, Medievalists’, *The Chronicle Review*, 24 August 2015. Archived 25 August 2015. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150826235007/http://chronicle.com:80/article/Dont-Be-Snobs-Medievalists/232539>.

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*Figure 10.1* Photo of Manaf Halbouni's Bus Installation 'Monument' in front of the Frauenkirche in Dresden, Germany. Photo by Manaf Halbouni [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)].

# 10 Dresden Will Never Be Hiroshima

## Morality, the Bomb and Far-Right Empathy for the Refugee<sup>1</sup>

*A.K.M. Skarpelis*

The Second World War is a frequent site for historical revisionism. In the case of the traumatic Dresden aerial bombings of 13–15 February 1945, the German far-right has been trying to rehabilitate the aggressor nation in a twisted variation on #metoo,<sup>2</sup> in which the suffering of German victims is invoked to assert the moral equivalence of all war victims, all the while casting aside questions of agency and their governments' war responsibility. Somewhat surprisingly, since 2000 the group managed to mobilise a highly cosmopolitan alliance around a rhetoric of compassion for civilians harmed in armed conflicts. In this opportunistic coat-tailing on the purportedly morally unproblematic memorialisation of innocent civilians, a disconcerting rhetorical overlap between the left and the far-right emerged around the trope of the refugee-victim.

Here, I draw on contemporary memorialisations of the Dresden bombings as one instance of this attempted reclaiming of war casualties and compare it to the fate of the victims of the Japanese atomic bombings. When the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the city's residents occupied a similar moral position to that of victims in other aerial bombings. However, Hiroshima has since the bombing become an international symbol for peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons. In addition to this symbolic transition for the city itself, those who perished in the bombings were anointed as morally innocent, while the casualties of the Dresden bombings did not. Hiroshima's transformation from perpetrator-nation city to symbol of world peace is extraordinary, and one that Dresden could not emulate in spite of continued rehabilitation attempts.

The chapter sets aside the question of the bombings' moral permissibility.<sup>3</sup> Drawing on social anthropology and practical ethics, I reconstruct successes and failures in the construction of moral innocence of the casualty and argue that while both populations had similar moral status prior to and during the bombings, their subsequent divergence can be explained through a combination of geopolitical interests and changing interpretations of the character and impact of the bombings. As collective



memory is built around moral judgement, contesting the moral status of casualties becomes one of the primary levers in political projects of commemoration.

### **Rehabilitation, Repetition and Redemption**

Historically, the aerial bombings of the Second World War in Germany and Japan have been morally evaluated in distinct ways. While the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings are globally condemned, and their cities have become symbols of world peace, Hamburg and Dresden received a less empathetic response. The transition for Hiroshima happened around the time that the city forged a successful civil society alliance with Auschwitz in the 1960s, as parts of its peace movement.<sup>4</sup> Through the efforts of the Hiroshima-Auschwitz committee that organised the 1963 Hiroshima-Auschwitz Peace March, Hiroshima found common moral ground with Auschwitz around the figure of the survivor-witness and in calls for peace around the slogan of 'Never Again'.<sup>5</sup> That the survivor emerged as spectator and eye-witness to a violent incident of unspeakable horrors and suffered for decades after the actual event would become a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for collectively recalling the event as traumatic and marking it as a symbol for peace and reconciliation. Hiroshima more than Nagasaki would achieve world historical rehabilitation and become seen as one of the casualties of the Second World War, a status that Dresden the city actively solicited but was never granted in spite of having ample survivor-witnesses itself.

While Dresden in its various guises—as memory site in the German Democratic Republic, as a city government post-reunification, as a collective of civil society and government organisations intent on rehabilitating the city's reputation—made similar moves in the hopes of achieving a victim status in third place, after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, attempts at situating its war dead among the canon of other aerial bombing victims failed and it was only in the 1990s, and after the end of the Cold War, that the Dresden dead were recognised as civilian victims and the aerial bombardment was widely judged to be morally problematic. Significantly, the argument made in favour of recognising Dresden as a victim city was that tens of thousands of the civilians who perished had been displaced ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe as well as forced labourers. This question of who precisely made up the dead was meaningful, as it was their moral status that would shape the assessment of the morality of the aerial bombing (or its condemnation).

Part of the process of rehabilitating a perpetrator nation's bombed city's status is turning the bombing into a grievable event in which the dead can be mourned, all without decimating the nation's war guilt. Cultural historian Anne Fuchs referred to Dresden as an 'impact event', characterised by excessive ruptures that are non-representable on account

of the sheer degree of horrors that characterise them. Despite their non-representability, these events call forth ever-new narratives 'from the perspective of the present'.<sup>6</sup> Taken together, this irrepresentability and continuous attempts at capturing the event bring about a variable and dissonant tapestry of collective memory. If endless repetition is a constituent fact of impact events, the fact of repetition itself ceases to be a point of significance: What becomes sociologically interesting instead are the event's specific re-interpretations and re-emplacements, that is to say, the arranging of historical events into a narrative with plot.

Robin Wagner-Pacifici describes events as 'restless by nature as historical subjects attempt alternately to bind them or set them free' and suggests the interpretive framework of political semiosis to help understand the 'machinery of history-in-the-making',<sup>7</sup> in which events and historical subject identities are formed. Historians share this interest in untangling the event by tracing processes of collective memory construction: Pierre Nora offered the concept of memory site (*lieu de mémoire*) to describe an 'entity (...) that has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community'.<sup>8</sup> Scrutinising these memory sites means untangling the practices of generating history, means tracing what of the historical record gets kept and what gets discarded, in short: understanding the 'structuring of forgetfulness'.<sup>9</sup> In Dresden, changing commemorations of the bombing actively contribute to the rewriting of history against a backdrop of relative stability in how the Holocaust specifically, and the Second World War more generally, is read as a unique event. It is in this tension between continuous commemorative metamorphosis and overall interpretive stability that the moral status of aerial bombing victims is assembled. In a game of historical revisionism, the German far-right has been leveraging the language of enlightened cosmopolitanism and invoked a shared global humanity in their reactionary denial of war guilt.

## An Extraordinary, Ordinary Bombing

For all intents and purposes, the bombing of Dresden employed techniques standard for Second World War aerial bombing. However, a confluence of factors—the bombing's extraordinary effectiveness, its timing and the demographic composition of its victims—made the bombing anything but ordinary. If mid-twentieth-century aerial bombing was a notoriously blunt tool incapable of much precision, the Dresden bombing was unexpectedly lethal because of favourable weather conditions and error-free collaboration between Blind Illuminator aircraft, Mosquitos, Master Bomber and the Lancaster, the different airplanes tasked with marking the area for bomb drop and then discharging their lethal cargo.<sup>10</sup> What made aerial bombings morally more controversial than other forms of warfare was that they blurred the boundary between soldier and civilian; combined with the technology's historical limitations,

this meant the tacit acceptance of large numbers of civilian casualties. While aerial bombings were not legally considered a war crime, the German bombing of Guernica in Spain had drawn transnational public ire about the unrepentant killing of civilians, seen as a violation of the just war norm of non-combatant immunity.

By February 1945, it appeared certain that Germany would lose the war; even Auschwitz had been liberated in January 1945 by Soviet forces. To bomb a city so close to almost certain defeat struck contemporary commentators as morally reprehensible. Thus, compared to other strategic aerial bombings in Germany that had cost more victims—like Operation Gomorrah that unleashed a firestorm over the city of Hamburg in July 1943, by some estimates killing twice as many Germans as in Dresden and wounding close to 37,000, Dresden seemed to defy the consequentialist normative ethical argument that holds an act to be morally permissible if the ends justify the means. Most notably among the critics of the Dresden bombing, political theorist Michael Walzer judged it to have been an act of terrorism, whereas the Hiroshima bombing was deemed justifiable on account of its impact on surrender and ought to be classified merely as war crime.<sup>11</sup>

Considering the timing of the bombing, most young German men had already been deployed, leaving the city's population disproportionately skewed towards women, young children and the elderly. In addition, as the war progressed, the advancing Red Army displaced ethnic Germans from the cities and villages they had occupied or settled ever further west, including to the city of Dresden. Much has been made of this demographic composition. Rather than consider the Dresden population as civilians who were a substantial and responsible part of a perpetrator state, this kind of narrative, by removing perpetrators geographically into combat zones removed from the city, was intended to inoculate the remaining population and prompt a kinder treatment of the survivors. In this narrative, although they were part of the perpetrator nation and many of the children and teenagers belonged to the Hitler Youth, they were ultimately not responsible for the wrongdoings of their government. In this, a dividing line of moral worth was drawn between civilians within a perpetrator nation more generally, and a subset of civilians within a perpetrator nation that on account of their demographic characteristics were unlikely to have engaged in significant amounts of wrongful action.

In narrating the peculiar demographics of the city, full of refugees and those who could not be conscripted, Dresden emerged as distinct from the rest of Germany, its National Socialist dictatorship and the generic Nazi perpetrator and party member. In addition to the demographics of its victims, the destruction of Dresden took on further valence based on its status as cultural heritage city. Nicknamed the 'Florence of the river Elbe' [Elbflorenz], Dresden was considered a significant European cultural capital. It was no longer only humans who were seen as victims, but

also the city itself. This combination of morally innocent victims and a city of global cultural importance would allow some stakeholders to attempt using the Dresden bombings, rather than Hamburg, as site for the nostalgic memorialisation of the war, something that Germany on account of the Holocaust had little occasion to do otherwise.

Concern and conflict about the total number of casualties—Holocaust denier David Irving wrongly guesstimated between one hundred thousand and a quarter million victims—opened up the possibility for the far-right to contest Germany's war guilt by suggesting that a large number of disproportionately innocent persons had been impacted by the event. By the time the total number of casualties had been revised by Historians' Commission to well below one hundred thousand, the far-right had already made use of the opening provided by contestation around casualty numbers and rallied collective protest. Contestation around numbers provided an opening for the rewriting of history and collective mobilisation around the trope of the morally innocent aerial bombing victim. The same opportunity was not afforded to victims in more severe aerial bombings—like Hamburg—because there was nothing to contest and subsequently organise against.

### **Commemoration and Counter-Movements**

It took little time for the bombing to become mobilised for political purposes. In the early years of the Cold War, the bombing became part of socialist anti-American propaganda and was framed in the then-East-German-city of Dresden as a symbol for US-American imperialist aggression; in the early 1980s, the peace movement used the bombing to call for demilitarisation and the abolition of nuclear arms, similar to the Japanese peace movements some decades prior. By the time of German reunification, Holocaust denier David Irving was invited to speak at a neo-Nazi rally in 1990, where he compared the victims of the aerial bombings to those who had been murdered at Auschwitz. In 2000, the neo-Nazi organisation *Junge Landsmannschaft Ostdeutschland* (JLO) started commemorating the bombing in Dresden. In these 'funeral marches' [Trauermarsch], held annually on the night of 13 February, the organisers reframed the air raids as a 'bombing Holocaust' and drew larger and larger numbers of participants each year. Although memory around the Dresden bombings had long been used for political ends, the JLO commemorations bore a marked transition in focus on the war casualties themselves, and within this group, that of the victims who had been displaced from Eastern Europe. As the JLO is a neo-Nazi organisation whose members derive their primary identity as descendants of the *Vertriebenen*, the ethnic Germans displaced from Eastern Europe after Germany's defeat, it is fitting that one of their arguments for re-memorialisng the bombing was their mistaken understanding that a majority of those who perished in Dresden in February had been displaced persons.

In the far right's re-emplotment, some victims of the Dresden bombing were depicted as doubly displaced, by having to flee from the Eastern Front on account of the advancing Red Army, and the bombing displacing them once more from a city in which they had finally found refuge. Drawing on this double displacement narrative, the right-wing activists semantically subverted the concept of the refugee and the displaced person: They generated parallels and rendered morally comparable civilians of a war-faring aggressor nation that was by February 1945 in the middle of one of Europe's worst twentieth-century ethnic cleansing projects, with those displaced and turned into refugees as result of National Socialist aggression. By characterising those who perished as displaced persons, an attempt was made to morally recast the event of the bombing as a war crime. Moreover, even though many of the child victims of the bombing had been members of the Hitler Youth, the right attempted their moral inoculation by foregrounding the fate of a minority of refugee casualties.

By narrowing the set of victims to those defenceless, and through the omission of National Socialist war crimes, the far-right was able to construct the residents of Dresden not only as morally innocent and not liable to harm, but also postulated moral equivalence of all aerial bombing victims, past and present. This reframing placed the event of Dresden among a roster of other war crimes and made the suffering of its victims comparable, and by extension *alike*, to other events suffered by the victims of the National Socialist dictatorship, ultimately opening up the door to relativising statements of Germany's war guilt. It is through creating this false equivalence on the backs of ethnic German migrants and through strategically mobilising their tragic suffering for their own political ends that the right sought to create grounds for re-commemorating Dresden as war atrocity.

The *Junge Nationalisten*, the youth organisation of the political far-right organisation National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), describes Dresden on the eve of the bombing as a city 'overcrowded with refugees from the Eastern Territories as well as numerous civilians'.<sup>12</sup> Invoking the language of pacifism, they denounced the bombing as 'irrelevant for the war' and similar in nature to the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia. In their attempts at locating the bombings through comparison to events internationally considered to be war crimes, German right-wing political groups were supported by a cosmopolitan alliance of European right-wing movements. In a video documenting the Action Against Forgetting's [Aktionsbündnis gegen das Vergessen] annual night-time torch march, Maik Müller, regional party leader of the youth arm of the NPD, invited European 'comrades' from several countries to speak on their perspective on the Dresden bombings. In their speeches, often held in the speaker's original language, the political activists compared the Dresden bombing to less controversial war crimes in order to recast the Dresden victims as morally comparable to the victims of other

historical and contemporary bombings.<sup>13</sup> Rather than disdain Eastern European activists along Second World War lines, German neo-Nazis and members of the *Identitäre* movement embraced other nationalities, as long as they too advocate closed borders, national protectionism and islamophobia. That the speakers delivered their missives in languages other than German, resulting in the audience having to stand through lengthy translations following the original speech, did not seem to faze the nativist and often monolingual audience. The public parading of foreign languages, the interpreters' multilingualism and the additional waiting time imposed on the audience standing in the February cold all became acceptable because they served ultra nationalist projects.

Reacting to these popular and novel forms of right-wing organising, the city of Dresden alongside various civil rights organisations decided to counter-mobilise. In 2009, a civil society organisation called Working Group February 13 [AG 13. Februar] began formally calling for civil society groups, the city and local governments, to jointly organise an annual memorialisation of the air raid to counteract the monopoly that neo-Nazis held up until that time.<sup>14</sup> In 2010, the city of Dresden decided to award the Dresden Prize, an annual international peace prize. Along with the annual peace prize, the city of Dresden mobilised financial resources to fund artworks by local and international artists on the themes of peace, conciliation and reconstruction. Dresden eventually became a symbol for 'a unifying collective and cultural memory', in which divisions could be overcome by mapping 'local identity onto global citizenship'.<sup>15</sup> The city had come full circle and began to brand itself as a site for peace and reconciliation, albeit about 30 years later than Hiroshima, and mostly in response to right-wing attempts at monopolising historical memory through false victim demographics that sought to place the bombing of Dresden as tragedy comparable to that of Auschwitz.

The ruined city of Dresden became a symbol of resilience in the face of total destruction, a symbol for moving on from what emerged in collective memory as a supra-historical event of ungraspable horrors. Dresden-the-city becomes both victim and primary protagonist, while the horrors of the NS regime recede into the background of the tragedy. While not blameless, Dresden emerges as actor without agency—a city of people who died, were injured or survived—but not one where people voted Hitler into power, sold out their Jewish neighbours or were fascists. Dresden after the aerial bombings relinquished most other roles and fully inhabits the role of the destroyed city whose physical reconstruction serves as a beacon for peace, hope and reconciliation. It managed to rise from the ashes of perpetrator city and occupy an uneasy status as symbol for reconciliation. However, its victims would never accede to the level of innocence, pity and veneration of those of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. It is this ambiguous status accorded to the victims that would become the pivot for much of the contention between left and right over how to interpret the Dresden bombings in Germany in the twenty-first century.

## Who Is an Innocent Victim? On the Morality of Harming Civilians in War

While the question of legality is central to determining whether a bombing was an act of terrorism, a war crime or legally permissible, the question of the bombing's morality raises more complicated issues about group membership and culpability that help explain political uses of commemoration among the far-right. Political activists are not the only ones trying to ascertain the moral status of those who perish in aerial bombing; the field of practical ethics in particular asks whether it is *moral*, rather than merely legal, to kill civilians in war.<sup>16</sup> In posing this question, philosophers make distinctions between combatants and civilians on the assumption that civilians deserve a degree of protection that combatants are not entitled to. Rather than a set of merely abstract and theoretical concerns, these questions matter for legitimization moves within commemorative politics, because the crux of the far-right's argument is premised on the moral innocence of the Dresden victims, a group status that they see as untouched by the German National Socialist government's actions.

Orthodox Just War Theories apply what they call the principle of discrimination to adjudicate the permissibility of harming civilians. The argument is one of 'noncombatant immunity', a principle by which no civilian, irrespective of the despicability of their actions, is liable to harm (ethicist Jeff McMahan defines 'liability to harm' as occasions in which civilians can become targets of defensive violent action).<sup>17</sup>

Conversely, every combatant, no matter how impeccable their moral compass as private person, is liable to harm on the basis of their group membership as combatant. In this mode of thinking, liability for and immunity to harm are functions of group membership rather than of individual actions.<sup>18</sup> A distinct set of positions maintain that civilian immunity can be moot under certain, rare, circumstances. In one of those scenarios, liability to harm is contingent on the actions of the civilian in question. In a partially overlapping consequentialist scenario in which the harming of civilians leads to a larger good like deterrence or surrender, non-combatants may become a legitimate target of military attack. Liability in this context is instrumental and based on the impact of an action.

Both sets of positions—orthodox theories of just war, and consequentialist theories of liability to harm—presume different understandings of groupness.<sup>19</sup> Civilian immunity in orthodox theories of just war is collective, while liability to harm can be either collective or individualist in consequentialist theories because it depends on the impact that this harm will have beyond the individual. If harming civilians has the power to bring about positive changes, perhaps even the end of the war, it can under certain circumstances be justified. Civilian immunity in consequentialist theories then is contingent and not absolute; it is neither solely membership-based or group-based, nor is it uniquely anchored in

individual rights. However, the bar for violating civilian immunity is set high.<sup>20</sup> From McMahan's perspective, one ought to judge both the residents of Hiroshima and Dresden, whatever their individual moral failings (joining the Hitler Youth, being deployed abroad to pursue colonial exploitation), as free from the liability to harm principle. And that while legally it may not have been a war crime to bomb the cities, it was a morally impermissible act in both instances.<sup>21</sup>

This question of how to distinguish between civilians of two different perpetrator nations harmed in war becomes the crux of victim subjectification, and of who becomes a morally innocent victim. A subset of questions within this scenario further distinguishes between different types of civilians: Those whose governments fare just wars, and those whose governments fare unjust wars. If it is not morally permissible to harm civilians of a nation faring an unjust war under any circumstance, then the Dresden victims ought to attain similar moral status to the victims of Hiroshima and perhaps also Auschwitz, on account of their group membership as non-combatants.

This would also mean that the civilian populations of Dresden and Hiroshima ought to be considered as morally equivalent, which raises the question of why only one population achieved moral rehabilitation. Such a line of argument sits rather uncomfortably with the historiographical record and opens up the possibility for historical revisionism of German war guilt and the peculiar brutality of the Holocaust in German twentieth-century history. If there is a distinction between civilians of a nation attacked in war on the one hand, and between civilians in a nation faring war on the other hand, then the Dresden victims may have to collectively take on responsibility for their nation's aggression and fall into a moral category distinct from those who perished in the concentration camps. This would not open space for historical revisionism.

In their attempts at garnering a specific kind of sympathy for the Dresden bombings, German far-right protesters subscribe to a strict version of non-combatant immunity untethered from justness of war arguments that reject consequentialist justifications for aerial bombings. That is to say, they make the moral argument that no aerial bombing is morally permissible, no matter the causal impact of the bombing on the unfolding of the war. On that basis, they ask to be allowed to commemorate the aerial bombing victims in whatever way they wish. At the same time, they operate in a parallel and distinct lane to the German state's coming to terms with the National Socialist Dictatorship [*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*], in that they omit other questions practical ethicists might raise about contextualising an individual aerial bombing within the larger context of wars of aggression and genocide. The far-right, whether wittingly or not, employs moral justifications paralleling those developed in practical ethics, and yet remain tied to a subset of moral concerns that fails to consider the full implications of their argument. This allows



them to appear empathetic about the plight of aerial bombing victims, all the while pushing ahead an agenda of historical revisionism in which the moral innocence of the aerial bombing victims offsets the atrocities the German state committed during the Second World War.

### **The Bomb, Suspicious Testimony and Biological Citizenship**

While practical ethics asks questions about the liability to be harmed, social anthropology engages with the epistemic politics of suffering and victimhood. Similar to moral innocence in ethics, trauma is a moral and not a psychological category that is built around forms of social and moral recognition. As such, it is deeply political and produced jointly through the mobilisation of social actors (politicians, medical professionals, artists and social activists of all political orientations) and the restructuring of moral principles.<sup>22</sup> Victims do not emerge as a natural category at the point of the event; they are made after the event. Who becomes a morally innocent victim is deeply contextual and mediated by time and political, economic and social context.

When the atomic bombs were dropped in Nagasaki and Hiroshima and when B-52s left Dresden in mere cinders, all three cities' populations had been established as permissible civilian targets. Aerial bombing, while not technically a war crime, had become an accepted if morally condemned means of warfare by the Second World War because of its presumed potential of accelerating surrender by stoking civilian discontent and demoralising the home front. The principle of discrimination was temporarily repealed, and non-combatant innocence came to collectively no longer matter. Whether the civilians bombed were innocent in their actions or not mattered little; what mattered was their group membership in a nation engaged in an unjust war that made them liable to harm. Far-Right mobilisation by the Young Nationalists (JN), the NPD and Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida) on the other hand would continuously attempt to reframe the question of liability to harm and innocence around action, rather than membership. By framing the specific demographics of Dresden in February 1945 as consisting mainly of women, children, the elderly and the displaced, they argued that the victims deserved large-scale commemorative events.

In public memory however, civilian survivors have not fared well. While survivor testimonies taken together usually produce narratives of collective fate, this spectacularly failed in Dresden. Eyewitness memory is notoriously unreliable, and victims of natural catastrophes and other traumatic events are usually treated generously when misremembering details of their suffering. Dresden eyewitness survivors recalled British airplanes engaging in strafing the city, attacking ground targets explicitly

with airplane-mounted and low-flying aircraft. This claim was repeated variously in National Socialist propaganda publications but was later found to be unwarranted by historians. Some survivors also recalled the peculiar colouring of the fires, which they took to mean that the British had dropped particularly devastating phosphor bombs. This claim, too, was found unwarranted by the Dresden Historians' Commission. On the basis of two refutable claims, German eyewitness testimony became suspicious and lost credibility.

In spite of real suffering, Dresden failed to produce a parallel narrative of collective innocence that could match that of Hiroshima. Arguably, the afterlives of the survivors in both nations were different on several counts. While cities in both countries sustained severe damage to their structures, survivors in Dresden fared better than their Hiroshima counterparts who had been irradiated. In the period between Germany and Japan's loss of the Second World War and German reunification then, a binary of victimhood emerged—on the one hand, that of the innocent survivors of the atomic bombs, and that of the survivors of questionable moral worth in the case of the Dresden aerial bombing.

While the main form of reconstruction in Dresden was infrastructural, survivors of the bombings in Japan faced a discrete process of corporeal reconstruction. Survivors of the two atomic bombings successfully leveraged biological citizenship as cultural resource in order to make claims on the state and were given legal recognition as 'hibakusha', a status entitling about 650,000 persons to free medical care from the Japanese government.<sup>23</sup> The long-term nature of bodily injury created by radiation poisoning produced a 'morally legitimate suffering body', visible over decades, and through its interactions with the public medical system remaining lodged in the public eye.<sup>24</sup> Korean residents of both cities, most of whom had been conscripted to work in Japan as colonial subjects on their end, faced multiple hurdles while trying to claim the same designation. Both Japanese cities and their residents could become morally rehabilitated through the construction of biological citizenship. Dresden, on the other hand, only succeeded in rehabilitating the status of the city itself; its harmed residents had to recede into the background. In that, they resembled the victims of 'Operation Meetinghouse', the Tokyo firebombing of 9 and 10 March 1945.

These divergent fates can be partially explained through the character of the bomb and its post-drop re-emplacements. Michael Gordin suggested that the status of nuclear bombs was historically contingent and not intrinsic to the bomb itself.<sup>25</sup> Analogously, neither the atomic bomb's effectiveness, nor its pernicious radioactivity, was fully recognised at the moment when the decision to use the bomb in the war was taken. It was the post-drop reevaluation of the bomb's impact—mistakenly understood in collective memory to have hastened Japanese surrender—that would provide the instrumental outcome necessary for

its moral justification. The victims could be collectively exonerated as martyrs for the allied cause, as the (erroneous) narrative was one that the atomic bomb prevented more American deaths and accelerated the end of the war. In the tricky Auschwitz-Hiroshima social movement alliance around the motto Never Again, the role of the United States in developing and deploying the bomb receded into the background. In parts, postulating symmetry between Auschwitz and Hiroshima could only work on the basis of a shared trauma of innocent victims; questioning agency would involuntarily lead to an unthinkable comparison between American forces and the National Socialists. In the German case, the impact of Dresden on Germany's surrender was less clear, and its survivors were not declared innocent victims. This is because they could not invoke biological citizenship of the sort available to survivors of the atomic bomb, in which they resembled the victims of the Tokyo firebombing, but also because the impact of Dresden on the outcome of the Second World War was never narrated in the same way that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were.

In addition to this specific configuration of agency between victims and those who dropped the bomb(s), and amplified by the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation, the atomic bomb itself became the nemesis, with questions of Japan's war guilt or the Allied Forces' agency in deciding to drop the atomic bomb brushed aside. The status of perpetrator in this scenario is glitchy and uneasily jitters between the victims of the bombing and those who dropped the bombs (fittingly, Harris and his Bomber Command never received any recognition or formal state honours from Churchill at the time). Ian Buruma went so far to suggest that 'the bomb' became a *deus ex machina*, with neither America's role in dropping it, nor Japan's wartime atrocities preceding it, ever receiving specific mention.<sup>26</sup> Negative emotions could be directed at the bomb, rather than the Americans, and postwar mobilisation could take on the form of anti-nuclear war activism. The Japanese government would cleverly market a dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' nuclear, between nuclear power plants and the atomic bomb. This symbolic chasm would allow the wholehearted symbolic pursuit of an anti-nuclear (bomb) future; the little regulated and rapid expansion of nuclear power plants collapsed with the nuclear incident on 11 March 2011.

After the atomic bomb became 'special', so did its victims. Initially part of the vast and uneasy global population of civilian non-combatants who were made to suffer for their governments' transgression, those impacted by the nuclear blast had their innocence restored and saw their cities become symbols for a non-atomic future and world peace. Although the bomb did not lead to Japanese surrender it became a distinctive historical artefact, not through its essence, but because of the peculiarity of its use in 1945 and its disuse after 1945. Dresden on the other hand successfully rehabilitated the reputation of its city but

could never garner the same type of sympathy for the survivors of the bombing. If both populations were considered permissible targets, the Japanese emerged anointed through multiple re-employment, whereas the Germans did not. The misunderstanding that the bomb ended the war, coupled with the newfound biological citizenship of the irradiated in a context of the Cold War, led to the victims becoming innocent—their past status was determined by a situation that unfolded after the traumatic event. The role of individual action and responsibility of the victims receded to the background, and it would instead be the moral valuation of the bombs and the afterlives of the newly constructed victim subject possessing a biological form of citizenship that shaped collective forms of memorialisation.

### **Peculiar Alignments around the Displaced and Refugees**

Returning to Dresden, the far-right based several of their alternative historical arguments legitimating night-time commemorative marches on a deliberate misreading of history, specifically a stubborn overstatement of casualty numbers and the distortion of victim demographics skewing towards overcounting refugees. While about 100,000 displaced persons had fled the Eastern Front and were in Dresden by January and February 1945, it is uncertain how many would become casualties of the bombing.<sup>27</sup> Given the constant that refugees' relocation preferences are rarely taken into consideration, and that they are accorded primacy of place in even fewer instances, their geographic placement in shabby quarters on the outskirts of the city rather than in desirable inner-city apartments suggests that it is unlikely that a large number of them perished in a bombing impacting mostly the centre of the city.

The far-right was not alone in this particular misreading of history. In spite of the city's historians' commission finding that the number of German refugees and displaced persons had been comparatively low when Dresden was struck, both the left and the far-right convened around the narrative of the vulnerable refugee. In that, both sides misread history for their own purposes; the far-right to relativise German war guilt, and the left to garner support for Syrian refugees. In 2017, a peculiar clash formed between the right and the liberal left who had mobilised in counter-protest to the annual funeral marches organised by the far right. The altercation was not around the question of how many persons perished in the bombing spree—the city's Historians' Commission had found the number to hover somewhere around a maximum of 25,000—but around the question of refugees. Both the left and the right misread history by attaching themselves to 'wrong' information about number of refugees and displaced persons killed during the bombing and used this misinformation to make diametrically opposed points. While the right-wing insisted that the presumed deaths of displaced Germans

were sufficient moral justification for re-memorialising a previously non-memorialised event, the German-Syrian artist Manaf Halbouni created a large-scale sculpture of battered, upturned buses to call attention to the fate of contemporary Syrian refugees. His goal was to generate empathy by drawing a parallel between what he understood to have been the fate of East European ethnic German refugees fleeing from the Red Army in 1945 with Syrians in 2018 fleeing civil war.

Halbouni created his sculpture, *Monument*, and installed it in front of the *Frauenkirche*, the Lutheran church destroyed during the Dresden bombing and left in ruins by East German leadership as symbol of American aggression. After German reunification, the church was rebuilt and became a symbol for peace and post-Communist reconstruction. The sculpture comprises three disused public transportation buses turned onto their nose that resemble eerie industrial towers. On the internet, Halbouni had seen photos of similarly upturned buses placed in the Syrian city of Aleppo and intended to use the disorientingly positioned buses as a symbol for those displaced by the Syrian civil war. In his understanding of the photographs, the buses had been placed as physical obstacles to protect the civilian population from sharpshooters, and were a barrier behind which public urban life, interrupted by civil war and deliberate shootings, could once more resume (if at a different pace). In Halbouni's words, the installation refers to the

current situation in Syria. With the image of the upturned buses in front of the *Frauenkirche*, a relationship is created between the situation of the people in the Near East and in Europe: The suffering and the unutterable losses, but also the hope for reconstruction and peace.

He further proclaimed that

a small symbolism shall arise and remind us that the *Frauenkirche* has not always been intact as it is now. I wanted to create a counterimage [Gegenbild] of this square that has been completely newly erected. I can remember when I was a child and when the *Frauenkirche* stood here as a ruin.<sup>28</sup>

The German far-right engaged in a different reading to Halbouni's likening of the Syrian civil war and the displaced Syrians (many of whom had sought asylum in countries like Germany) to those Germans displaced around the end of the Second World War. Pegida in particular took offense at the comparison, as it appeared to belittle the suffering the city of Dresden experienced. Beyond bristling at the comparison between the citizens of Aleppo and Dresden, the far-right accused Halbouni of missing the implications posed by a flag placed on top of one of the upturned

buses in the photo that served as inspiration for the installation. The flag belonged to the anti-government rebel group Ahrar al-Sham and it emerged that the group may have used the buses for cover from sharpshooters of the government. Rather than a symbol for peace and resilience of a population under attack, the buses could now be interpreted as a shield *for* a rebel group—or, in the eyes of the far-right, a terrorist group whose activities were being implicitly sanctioned by Halbouni's installation. Rather than a symbol for peace and the shared collective fate of those displaced by armed conflict, they read the sculpture as endorsing terrorism. By the time that Ammar Abdullah, the photographer who had taken the original photo for Reuters in the city of Aleppo, remarked that the bus blockade was erected by the provincial government of Aleppo for purposes of civilian protection, the symbolic damage had been achieved by that point.<sup>29</sup>

Oddly, it was precisely the rendering-comparable of contemporary Syrian refugees and the victims of the Dresden bombing by Halbouni that ignited the ire of the far-right—Halbouni engaged the wrong comparison. While drawing on the abstract humanitarian concept of the displaced, the right remained wedded to the historical particularities of the Second World War and refused to engage diachronically and compassionately with the plight of refugees overall; the specific moral valuation of the bombing victims as displaced made sense only as long as this would purposefully lead to a recasting the bombing as a historically comparable disaster. By using refugees as abstract concept,<sup>30</sup> the far-right recast the bombing as comparable, all the while retaining ownership over the specific historicity of the refugee. Empathy works historically backward, but fails to extend into the present. Halbouni on the other hand focused on and compared the plight of the displaced, without postulating equivalency of the event itself.

### **Conclusion: Eventual Re-Emplotments and a Special Bomb**

Neither the status of the event nor that of the victim is constant, as events and historical subjects achieve meaning through political semiosis.<sup>31</sup> In the case of Dresden versus the atomic bomb, geopolitical interests, the character of the bomb and its perceived impact after the drop all re-emplotted the event, with the consequence of altering the moral status of the bombing victim after the fact. The victims of the Dresden aerial bombings lacked the cachet of a 'special' bomb, and ultimately could not sway their meagre cultural resources into a form of biological citizenship rehabilitating their moral status. In parts, this is connected to the perceived impact of the bomb. A misreading of history consisting of the perception that the atomic bomb sped up Japan's surrender contributed to the painful and cumbersome anointing of the victims; the lack

of impact of the Dresden bombings on German surrender on the other hand carried over onto how the German victims were perceived. While the city of Dresden became a beacon of peace and solidarity, the victims never could, especially not after the far-right strategically deployed their suffering for political ends.

Having exploited uncertainty around the number of casualties in the 1990s to make the case for a rehabilitation of the victims within a larger argument relativising Germany's war guilt, the far-right concocted a remarkably cosmopolitan European alliance of right-wing movements. The inherent contradiction of coalitions consisting of Germans and activists from countries Germany had occupied, exploited and decimated during the Second World War was surmounted by an alliance based on ethnonationalism and efforts to rehabilitate war-period Germany in a historically revisionist project. As part of this project, the far-right engaged in creative forms of misanthropic and xenophobic conceptual stretching around 'the refugee' and 'empathy' for morally innocent victims of aerial bombings. This empathy, in turn, allowed them to create false equivalencies between the victims of aerial bombings on the one hand, and casualties who perished in the Second World War more generally.

Rhetorically, the far-right drew on arguments about non-combatant immunity mirroring those within just war theories in the field of practical ethics. They apply a consequentialist criterion in their assessment of the bombing—was it worth it on account of its consequences for the war?—and find that the Dresden bombing was unwarranted, and hence its victims mournable. The parallels between practical ethicists and the far-right come to a halt at this point, as the far-right treats the victims of the Dresden bombing as morally distinct from the overall regime. It does this by suggesting that the Dresden victims were composed of a demographic separate from that of the overall population in such a way that the group was inoculated from political participation on account of age or gender. In the very same distancing move however, the far right also attempts to transfer and extend the collective innocence of the Dresden victims, once established, to the National Socialist regime more generally. While misreadings of history are not the partisan prerogative of one side or the other, the German far right continued to attempt leveraging the collective innocence of a presumed victim demographic for purposes of relativising Germany's war guilt.

In their emulation of the language of the left—that of garnering sympathy for casualties of war by calling for solidarity on grounds of a shared humanity—the far-right stretched the concept of empathy in order to engage in a deeply misanthropic and xenophobic project that borrowed language from the left to rehabilitate the right. If both sides of the spectrum misinterpreted history for their own purposes and were fast to point out the other side's misreading of history, it was only the left that came to formally correct their errors. The far right, in spite of drawing on fairly sophisticated arguments from the realm of ethics and pointing

out historical misreadings on the part of the left, would prove incapable of providing a corrective for their own misinterpretations.

## Notes

- 1 Acknowledgements: Thank you to Louie Dean Valencia-Garcia, Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Thomas Blake for comments on an earlier version of this paper, and to Paige Sweet and Regina Rini for literature suggestions on trauma and the morality of wars.
- 2 The #metoo movement, brainchild of activist Tarana Burke, was created in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence heal through empathy and community-based action. The movement generates solidarity and comfort by having survivors share their stories of abuse and empathising with others by recognising the ubiquity of sexual trauma through the slogan 'me too'. The German far-right, although not explicitly drawing on Tarana Burke's expression, employs a similar move in which the testimonials of German war victims are invoked to create a solidary global community of civilian victims of all wars. This is twisted because the far-right's motivation is not a pacifist one, but a revisionist one in which civilian deaths are strategically used to contest German war guilt.
- 3 Anglophone witnesses to the bombings, often prisoners of war, like Kurt Vonnegut and Victor Gregg, condemned the bombings, while on the academic side most famously Walzer suggested that bombing Dresden was defensible as a just intervention in a time of supreme emergency; Hiroshima was an indefensible act of terrorism that could not be justified by virtue of having sped up surrender.
- 4 Ran Zwigenberg, "Never Again: Hiroshima, Auschwitz and the Politics of Commemoration もう二度と... 広島、アウシュヴィッツと記念の政治学," *The Asia-Pacific Journal / Japan Focus* 13, no. 3 (2015).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Anne Fuchs, *After the Dresden Bombing: Pathways of Memory, 1945 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 12.
- 7 Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *What Is an Event?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017): 154. The framework has three operational logics that conjointly produce events—the performative, the demonstrative and the representational. While not explicitly discussed, her logic of inquiry, that of taking apart events as defined by agents' semiotic acts and their uptake, forms the epistemological backbone of this chapter.
- 8 Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past Vol. 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): preface.
- 9 Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux De Mémoire* (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1997): 4; Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994): 4.
- 10 Tami Davis Biddle, "Dresden 1945: Reality, History, and Memory," *The Journal of Military History* 72, no. 2 (2008).
- 11 In this view, war crimes are less morally problematic than acts of terrorism. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).
- 12 Source: <https://junge-nationalisten.de/allgemein/pressemitteilung-jn-stellt-lehrkraefte-bildungsmaterial-zur-verfuegung/> [last accessed on July 31, 2019] Junge Nationalisten, "Pressemitteilung: Jn Stellt Lehrkräften Bildungsmaterial Zur Verfügung," <https://junge-nationalisten.de/allgemein/pressemitteilung-jn-stellt-lehrkraefte-bildungsmaterial-zur-verfuegung/>, <https://junge-nationalisten.de/allgemein/pressemitteilung-jn-stellt-lehrkraefte-bildungsmaterial-zur-verfuegung/>.



- 13 Dresden Gedenken, "Vergesst Uns Nicht!," Archived 21 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190821144425/http://www.dresden-gedenken.info/2017/02/12/vergesst-uns-nicht-dresden-gedenken-2017/>, <http://www.dresden-gedenken.info/2017/02/12/vergesst-uns-nicht-dresden-gedenken-2017/>.
- 14 AG 13. Februar, "Ag 13. Februar," Archived 21 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/save/https://13februar.dresden.de/de/ag/ag-13.-februar.php>, <https://13februar.dresden.de/de/ag/ag-13.-februar.php>.
- 15 Fuchs, *After the Dresden Bombing: Pathways of Memory, 1945 to the Present*: 2.
- 16 Practical ethics as a field presumes that philosophical principles cannot be applied in a straightforward way to pressing political problems and thus seeks to bridge theory and practice by taking seriously constraints actors face in the real world when trying to make moral decisions. Although in aftermath of the Second World War aerial bombings were not considered war crimes, with the experiences of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War and the fire bombings of London, Hamburg and Tokyo during the Second World War, such practices of warfare became widely condemned in spite of being technically legal. Practical ethics grapples with the question of whether it is ever morally defensible (rather than simply 'legal') to bomb civilians in wartime. Frances Myrna Kamm, *Ethics for Enemies Terror, Torture, and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); *ibid.*; Seyla Benhabib, "Unholy Wars," *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 9, no. 1 (2002).
- 17 McMahan goes further to argue that the 'moral basis of liability to defensive violence is moral responsibility for a threat of wrongful harm and claims that on this criterion virtually all who fight in wars that lack a just cause are liable to military attack' McMahan, *Killing in War*: 155.
- 18 *Ibid.*: 208 ff.
- 19 Both sides also consider the severity of harm imposed on civilians, and suggest that it is morally more defensible to impose financial harm—like reparations imposed after the termination of war—rather than physical harm, like the loss of life in an aerial bombing.
- 20 Any intervention comes up against four limitations: (1) The civilians' responsibility for the war that their country is waging is often limited, and as such not proportional to the harms that they would face; (2) it is opportunistic to use people as mere means; (3) the causal effectiveness of harming civilians on the status of war is highly uncertain; (4) responsible civilians are often intermingled with innocent ones, and as such it is hard to separate out the truly innocent from civilians liable to harm. The novelist George Orwell on the other hand did not subscribe to any of these arguments—neither the discrimination principle that relies on group-based membership, nor the severely circumscribed liability of harm argument of McMahan. Instead, he proposed a radically egalitarian argument that eschews any group distinction and works on an outcome-based principle of shared casualties: If young men can be involuntarily conscripted into the armed forces and are exposed to death, then civilians should also share in the likelihood of being killed. Making any kind of group-based distinction based on membership, rather than action, between combatants and civilians in this view was indefensible. See McMahan, *Killing in War*: 231 ff.
- 21 This moral argument is not based on a distinction between combatants and civilians, but rather rests on the argument that it is extremely hard to justify harming civilians under any circumstance.

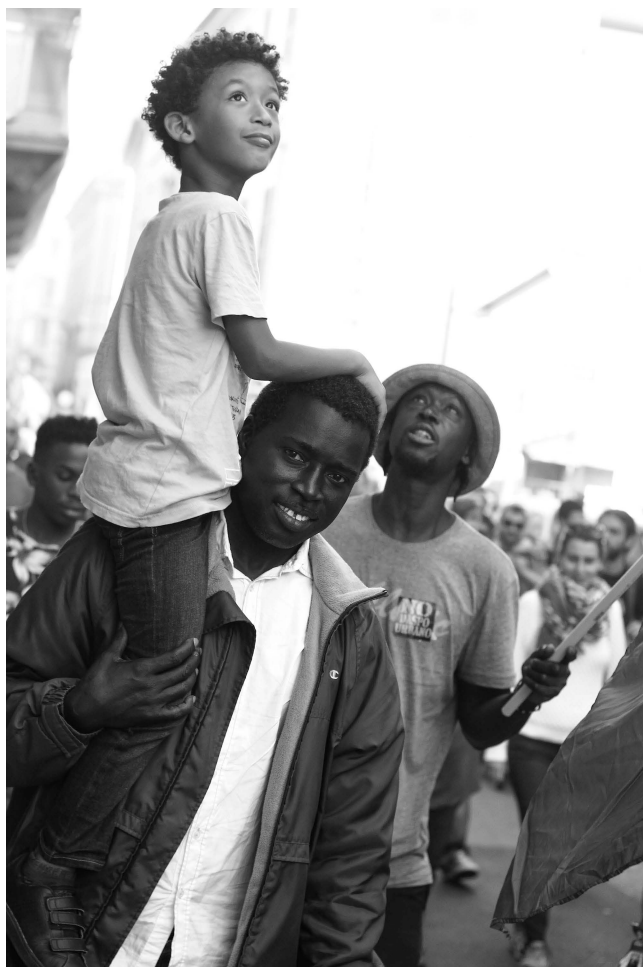
- 22 Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (2009).
- 23 Biological citizenship is defined as 'a complex bureaucratic process by which a population attempts to secure a status as harmfully exposed and deserving of compensation. It entailed populations demanding social welfare based on strict criteria that might acknowledge biological injury and compensate for it'. Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed Biological Citizens after Chernobyl; with a New Introduction by the Author* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2013): 21; *ibid.* Hibakusha (被爆者) literally translates as person who has been the target of a bomb, but in Japan it is used solely to refer to atomic bomb victims. See also Kyōgikai Nihon Gensuibaku Higaisha Dantai, *Hibakusha: Hiroshima, Nagasaki* (東京: 日本被団協; Tōkyō: Nihon Hidankyō, 1982). And Gerald F. O'Malley, "The Grave Is Wide: The Hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Legacy of the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission and the Radiation Effects Research Foundation," *Clinical Toxicology* (15563650) 54, no. 6 (2016).
- 24 Miriam Iris Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (2011).
- 25 Michael D. Gordin, *Five Days in August: How World War II Became a Nuclear War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- 26 Ian Buruma, "The Devils of Hiroshima," *New York Review of Books*, 1990.
- 27 Including cremations, there were 21,271 registered funerals immediately after the attacks and Hans Voigt, a local official in the city the time, had reported 35,000 dead to the authorities. Some years later, Georg Feydt in 1953 reported 39,773 in 1953 while the *New York Times* estimated between 20,000 and 35,000 casualties (Davis Biddle 2008). Joseph Goebbels quickly inflated the numbers for his own propaganda aims.
- 28 Manaf Halbouni, "Kunstinstallation "Monument" 2017," Archived 21 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190821144923/https://www.manaf-halbouni.com/work/monument/>, <https://www.manaf-halbouni.com/work/monument/>.
- 29 Matthias Meisner, "Die Busse Vor Der Frauenkirche Sind Ein Hoffnungszeichen," Archived 21 August 2019. <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/streit-um-aleppo-monument-in-dresden-die-busse-vor-der-frauenkirche-sind-ein-hoffnungszeichen/19382694.html>, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/streit-um-aleppo-monument-in-dresden-die-busse-vor-der-frauenkirche-sind-ein-hoffnungszeichen/19382694.html>.
- 30 What difference to Sewell's semantic slippage of 'le peuple' in his interpretation of the French Revolution! Bill Sewell, *Logics of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
- 31 Wagner-Pacifici, *What Is an Event?*

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*Figure 11.1* Young African father with daughter in arms during an anti-fascist parade organised in Savona, Italy on 15 October 2017. Brothers Art/Shutterstock.com.

# 11 Between Past and Present

## Allied Sexual Violence as a 'Usable Past' in Contemporary Italy

*Stephanie De Paola*

In Italy, the post-1989 period saw the widening of a new historical trend, which revealed a renewed interest in the crimes committed by the Allies during the occupation of Italy in the Second World War—including rape committed by soldiers of colour—, as well as in other aspects of the occupation deemed unsavoury such as interracial sexual encounters between Italian women and Allied soldiers. In those years of political crisis—which saw the disappearance of long-standing political parties and brought media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing coalition into power in 1994 and then for most of the 2000s included a party that was virtually heir to the fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano, Alleanza Nazionale (AN)—such aspects of the Allied occupation figured in a number of non-scholarly works of history, and in Italian political discourse, often serving political ends.<sup>1</sup> International events, such as the collapse of the Cold War order and increasing globalisation, in addition to domestic political events, contributed to a resurgence of neopatriotism and an increased interest in national identity, a phenomenon that provided fertile ground for revisionism.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the 'sexual disorder'<sup>3</sup> that ensued during the Allied occupation of Italy was revived in popular and official memory for different, and sometimes unrelated, purposes in the post-1989 period, including to criminalise contemporary (male) African immigrants to Italy, to account for the weak state of Italian national unity and to claim the status of victim for various groups of Italians, the latter which sometimes functioned as an escape from guilt for fascist crimes. Not unrelated to this issue was the fact that in those same years, as scholars such as Robert Gordon have noted, 'overarching master narratives, of fascism and the Holocaust, were cracking'.<sup>4</sup> Particularly subject to revision was the so-called anti-fascist Resistance narrative, which maintained that many Italians, with the help of the Allies, fought a heroic and patriotic war of resistance against their Nazi-fascist oppressors, and which was also, incidentally, the narrative dominant on the political left.<sup>5</sup>

### **Pansa, Bracalini and Di Fiore: New Echoes of *Italia Paradiso Nero***

Early traces of this revisionist trend—which sought to refocus attention from fascist crimes to the suffering of Italian civilians above all

other aspects of the war—can be found in the 1980s and became more prominent in the post-1989 period.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps one of the earliest examples of this trend is the book *Italia Martire: sacrificio di un popolo*,<sup>7</sup> re-published in 1980 and edited by the Associazione Nazionale Vittime Civile di Guerra (ANVCG), an organisation established in 1943 for the protection of victims of war—and, from 1943–1945, for victims of Allied bombings.<sup>8</sup> *Italia Martire*, in fact, seems to be a point of origin for many myths about the war—particularly myths about Allied sexual violence—which were further popularised in subsequent works such as the 1998 *La ciociara e le altre: Il corpo di spedizione francese in Italia 1943–1944* by Massimo Lucoli and Davide Sabatini, among others.

More recently, works by well-known Italian journalists, such as Giampaolo Pansa, whose work on the Resistance has raised heated polemics and has become very popular on the right, Romano Bracalini, ex-vice director of Tg3 in Milan, and Gigi Di Fiore, a journalist for the Neapolitan newspaper *Il Mattino*, have embraced this revisionist trend, while sometimes incorporating other sordid aspects of the Allied occupation such as the widespread prostitution engendered by the American occupation.<sup>9</sup> In these works, the authors variously criticise the hegemony of the anti-fascist Resistance narrative and the related silencing of partisan and Allied crimes. All appear to be revising, to different degrees and ends, what they see as a moral balance-sheet of the war that labelled the Germans and fascists bad and the partisans and Allies good. For instance, Pansa laments in the introduction to his 2012 book *La guerra sporca dei partigiani e dei fascisti*:

The political opportunism that always and in any case dictated the exaltation of the partisan struggle. The organizational and cultural predominance of the PCI [The Italian Communist Party], director of an operation that was at the same time rhetorical and false.<sup>10</sup>

While Pansa seems to criticise the fact that the persistence of certain political orientations on the left prevented historians from critically analysing the Resistance—and, in particular its crimes—Bracalini and Di Fiore, for their part, argue that a similar historical blindness meant that the Allied war-effort was not properly interrogated. In particular, both authors felt that the widespread sexual violence committed by the French colonial troops in southern Lazio had been overlooked and, in some cases, purposely silenced. According to Bracalini's 2008 book *Paisà*:

On the private and public life of Italians under the Allied administration—from Sicily to Tuscany—nothing or very little has been written. Historians of every leaning have preferred to focus their research on the German occupation in the North and on the Republic of Salò, on Nazi crimes and their fascist accomplices, in

conclusion, on the 'evil ones'... Therefore, they have been strangely very silent on the violence, massacres, and rapes carried out against tens of thousands of women, and young boys and girls by the Moroccans and Senegalese in Southern Lazio and Tuscany.<sup>11</sup>

Di Fiore similarly argues in his *Controistoria della liberazione*, 'For years, out of fear of diminishing the cause of the Allied intervention in Italy in 1944, political obstacles and ideological passivity prevented attempts at an in-depth analysis of the behavior maintained by the troops toward the population'.<sup>12</sup>

To redress these so-called silences both Bracalini and Di Fiore set aside an entire chapter in their recent books on the rapes committed by the French colonial troops, highlighting the fact that the violation of innocent Italian civilians by these 'barbaric hordes' was the heavy (and still unrecognised) price that Italy paid for the war. Italian women are likened to pure, 'sacrificial lambs' who symbolise the violence done to Italy during the war, and the sourness of defeat. The fact that this violence was committed by strange-looking, incomprehensible men and was aimed at members of the population who were usually spared (i.e. men, children, seniors, nuns and priests) drove home the horrific nature of the crimes. For Di Fiore, though, 'the principal sacrificial lambs were the women, in a conflict that transformed their bodies in tacit reward for the liberation from the German invasion'.<sup>13</sup> According to Bracalini, it was the particular fact that these female bodies were white—and, therefore, usually off-limits to the colonial soldiers—which made them even more appealing: Noting that 'the white woman of the defeated country was the promised prey, the most desired morsel', Bracalini was drawing on the language of the wartime and immediate postwar period.<sup>14</sup>

Bracalini asserts that French colonial soldiers raped 60,000 Italian women during the occupation; but this number, for which he does not provide a source, appears to refer to the number of civilians who requested indemnities for a wide range of crimes and violence (not limited to rape) committed by these troops.<sup>15</sup> There is a lack of consensus about the number of rapes that occurred and the figures vary widely. Considering the fact that rape is a notoriously under-reported crime it is unlikely that the actual figure will ever be known, though it is probably somewhere in the range of several thousand.<sup>16</sup> In any case, for Bracalini, these 'forgotten' rapes in Southern Lazio and Tuscany were nothing short of a 'crime against humanity' that deserved to be 'reopened'.<sup>17</sup>

This rallying cry is not the only instance in which Bracalini seems more concerned about the present than the past. In his chapter on the rapes in southern Lazio, he draws a direct parallel between the arrival of the French colonial troops in Italy during the Second World War and the immigration of northern Africans to Europe in the present—another rather common thread in popular histories of the topic and in Italian



political discourse. According to Bracalini, these men joined General Juin's army for the same reasons that they come to Italy today: to 'escape from misery' even, as he sarcastically adds, after wanting independence.<sup>18</sup> This muddling of the past and the present also carries over into descriptions of these soldiers. He seems to be drawing on stereotypes and fears about contemporary Islamic jihadism as he describes the French colonial soldiers yelling praises to Allah as they enter into battle, a detail that does not appear to have any basis in history. Furthermore, his references to the second-class status of women in Islamic society also seem to be heavily rooted in contemporary Western critiques of Islam. He appears to relish in emphasising their backwardness as he tells an anecdote about North African culture before and after the American invasion, which appears to come from Curzio Malaparte's 1949 novel *The Skin*, a novel that, not incidentally, offers a highly racist view of African and African American soldiers, the former as pederasts and the latter as over-sexed.<sup>19</sup>

But, perhaps most significantly, Bracalini seems to be using the Allied occupation as a narrative apparatus to highlight Italy's 'mezzogiorno problem', that is, the apparent enduring divisions between an industrialised northern and 'backwards' southern Italy. Bracalini, who has been associated with events and conferences of the Northern League, a xenophobic party that sees the industriousness of northern Italy hampered by a perennially 'backward' and corrupt southern Italy, is not averse to stereotyping southerners as loud-mouthed, superstitious and morally corrupt.<sup>20</sup> It is not a coincidence that he only associates venereal disease and prostitution with the South; in fact, he suggests that all of the women in Tombolo—the pine forest between Pisa and Livorno which housed the Allied warehouses and which was an infamous meeting place between Italian *signorine* (prostitutes) and African American soldiers and black marketers during the war—hailed from cities in southern Italy.<sup>21</sup> While many of the women were southerners, there were also many local women who prostituted themselves to these soldiers, as we know from archival records.<sup>22</sup> Bracalini's interpretation of Tombolo is, thus, not the stereotypical one from the movies and novels about Tombolo from the 1950s. Most notably absent from his depiction of the infamous pine forest are references to African American soldiers and interracial sex. Instead, Bracalini draws on the memory of Tombolo and the crime and prostitution associated with it, to criminalise southern Italians, which he does repeatedly throughout the book.

Through episodes in the history of the Allied occupation—from sexual violence to wartime censorship—Bracalini's *Paisà* tells a larger story about the legacies of fascism in postwar Italy, the hypocrisies and corruptions of the Italian left in the post-1945 period (whose real roots he sees as laying in fascism) and the divisions between northern and southern Italy. The Allied occupation, then, serves as a metaphor to highlight the vast differences between North and South, to explain the

failures of Italian society in the postwar period,<sup>23</sup> and to stereotype the flaws of the (southern) Italians.<sup>24</sup> According to Bracalini, even the Allies took note of the differences between northern and southern Italy: 'The North, from Tuscany and above, remained different and far. The war would widen the gap between the two Italies and the Anglo-Americans would become aware of this too as they climbed the peninsula'.<sup>25</sup>

But it is not only Bracalini that is concerned about the present. Journalist Gigi Di Fiore also uses the history of the Allied occupation of Italy for contemporary purposes. In his view, the Allied occupation of Italy was not only partially responsible for the weakness of the postwar Italian nation state and postwar Italian democracy but also for the widening of the gap between northern and southern Italy. It is ironic that Di Fiore, a self-appointed advocate of the South and meridionalism—the study of the political, economic and cultural effects of the unification process on southern Italy—which is also a political reaction to regional parties like the Northern League, makes an argument that in some ways dovetails with Bracalini's. In fact, both authors looked back to the Second World War to explain 'what went wrong', in Italy's national history and to explain its current failings and divisions.<sup>26</sup> According to Di Fiore, the Risorgimento and the Resistance, the two seminal moments in the history of Italy, were also the two most responsible for the divisions between North and South. He draws a direct and ahistorical parallel between the treatment of southern Italy by Piedmont during the wars of unification and the treatment of southern Italy by the Allies during the Second World War, and argues that these conflicts contributed to the imbalances between the two regions, to the disadvantage of the South: 'The Allies did not spare the Mezzogiorno grief, blood and suffering, like the troops of Piedmont eighty years before'.<sup>27</sup> But one of the most significant differences between the perspectives of Di Fiore and Bracalini is that Di Fiore considers the South a victim, first of Piedmont during the Risorgimento, and then of the Allies during the Second World War, evidenced in part by the rape of Italian women and their descent into prostitution in overwhelming numbers: in short, by Italians' status as a conquered and defeated people and their treatment as such by the Allies. For Bracalini, however, Italians were not victims, and southerners are portrayed as particularly far from this category. Rather, southerners seemed to provide fertile ground for the moral degradation and political corruption that the Allies and their anti-fascist compatriots brought.<sup>28</sup>

Pansa, for his part, seems less concerned with Allied crimes and more concerned with those of the partisans.<sup>29</sup> However, this does not mean that sexual relationships between Allied soldiers and Italian women are not sensationalised. In the author's *The Dirty War*, a semi-autobiographical, novelistic account of the war, descriptions of African American soldiers rely heavily on stereotypes and prurient depictions of sexual relationships between these soldiers and Italian women fill some chapters.

Black American soldiers are portrayed as lusting after white women—in particular blonde white women—as Curzio Malaparte<sup>30</sup> and the journalist Giancarlo Fusco had claimed decades earlier.<sup>31</sup> For their part—Pansa notes—some Italian women found these soldiers attractive in an exotic way. Undoubtedly, the wealth and abundance of the American troops were also not an insignificant draw:

But the black soldiers of the Buffalo did not consider Italian women a spoils of war to subjugate and rape. ‘They only wanted to make love with white women, a prohibited dream in many American states’ explained Uncle Evasio [an invented figure in the narrative]. ‘And they were ready to pay well for the service. Thanks to the Am-lire, printed by the Treasury of the United States for the troops sent in Italy. Or by offering in exchange provisions and goods of the utmost necessity, which had disappeared from stores with the war and the German occupation’.<sup>32</sup>

Black soldiers’ ability to have sex with Italian women, suggests Pansa, hinged on their higher social status. While it was true that a majority of black soldiers, like white soldiers, did pay or barter for sex, about 20% reported that they paid nothing, which was also similar to white soldiers.<sup>33</sup> Occupied Italy, in Pansa’s interpretation, thus, became a space where norms and laws regulating sexuality between blacks and whites could no longer be properly enforced, an issue that had caused much concern during the war:

The black soldiers of the Buffalo went crazy for white women. In the United States none of them would even dare to touch with a finger a woman who was not African American. But in the Italian paradise it was possible.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, it was not only Tombolo—the famous haven of Italian prostitutes and African American soldiers in Livorno—that became a Black Paradise but Italy as whole.

While there is, of course, some truth to these authors’ claims that the anti-fascist Resistance narrative was hegemonic and did obscure certain aspects of the war, these histories seek to make their points by variously merging history with fiction or invention, by an overwhelming and uncritical reliance on literature and on witness testimonies/memoirs,<sup>35</sup> by eschewing the work of historians and scholars who have studied these topics (referring to the crimes of the French colonial troops as ‘silenced’ when they can no longer be wholly described as such),<sup>36</sup> and through the use of stereotypes—often racist—and symbols, which crystallised in the war years. Moreover, the authors’ identification of rapes by the French colonial troops as ‘crimes against humanity’ and ‘war crimes’ and their emphasis on the ‘the duty to not forget’ [*dovere di non dimenticare*]

and calls for ‘never again!’ [*mai più*] recall the language and practices of post-Holocaust memory politics, while also obscuring the history of their prosecution. Associations with such memory practices highlight the unresolved and extreme nature of this particular past and the desire to portray it as such while also, perhaps, representing an outgrowth of what Giovanni De Luna has recently called Italy’s ‘Republic of Suffering’ [*Repubblica del dolore*].<sup>37</sup>

## More Usable Pasts

In recent years, political parties and even some activist organisations in Italy have drawn on the collective memory of the Second World War sexual violence, mimicking this recent revisionist trend. For instance, in 2005, AN (National Alliance), a right-wing political party and the heir of the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano, released a poster calling for an end to sexual violence against women, demanding that the perpetrators of such violence be punished according to the law [against sexual violence] passed in Italy in 1996. The poster, which read in bold ‘Never Again!’, featured a screenshot of the infamous rape scene from Vittorio De Sica’s 1960 film *La Ciociara*. Critics of the AN poster voiced their concern about the use of this particular image, which, though purporting to raise awareness about violence against women, seemed to, instead, re-evolve the fears of ‘the black peril’. Critics also did not fail to notice the particular salience this image took on in the atmosphere of heightened fears surrounding the growing number of ‘extracomunitari’ (non-EU immigrants, a euphemism for non-whites) in Italy, exacerbated also by the country’s current economic crisis.<sup>38</sup> Three years later, in 2008, a women’s organisation in Bologna announced an anti-violence against women initiative with posters showing a propaganda image from the fascist period—of a black American soldier sexually assaulting a white woman—which read, ‘Defend her! She could be your mother, your wife, your sister, your daughter’.<sup>39</sup> The publication of the flyers elicited intense reactions. A number of local politicians representing the Partito Democratico (PD) argued that the image, regardless of the organisers’ intentions, criminalised foreigners. Most recently, this poster has been resurrected by the neo-fascist party Forza Nuova in the context of the ius-soli citizenship debates. However, the text of the Forza Nuova poster has been slightly altered from the original to read: ‘Defend her from the New Invaders!...’. With these words, Forza Nuova’s poster explicitly connects the occupying Allied soldiers of colour in the Second World War and African male immigrants in Italy in the present. While the poster very clearly suggests that both groups pose(d) threats to the Italian national body, the latter represents an additional threat: a strain on the beleaguered Italian welfare state.<sup>40</sup>

In 2013, a memorial event planned to honour the liberation of Elba by the Allies (many of whom were of African origin, especially from Senegal) in 1944 was cancelled amidst political controversy involving local

politicians representing both the AN and the PD. Responding to the cancellation of the memorial event, one of the leaders of the Senegalese community in Florence, Baye Diouf, said that in spite of the fact that some of the African troops certainly did commit horrific crimes,

We hope for peace and to rebuild a shared memory: because we are Italians and we contributed to the making of Italian history. The problem is that we are black, if a German arrived at Elba, the doors would be open to him, instead—for us, they are not.<sup>41</sup>

What seems to be at stake in this kind of political discourse is not the actual violence women experienced during the war but, rather, threats to the nation's confines. The appropriation of this memory in contemporary political discourse reveals more about the power of the trope of the violated woman/nation and less about gendered violence and the means of combating it. The incident in Elba and the release of the AN poster especially point to the fact that it is not rape per se that must be stopped but, rather, rape by non-white immigrants, embodied by African men in the visual imagery. In such discourses, past and present are linked as memories of violence by foreign (African or African American) soldiers bleed into threats of sexual violence by contemporary immigrants also from Africa, threatening the Italian national body. Moreover, the harkening back to the occupation perhaps had a particular relevance for post-1989 Italy, which saw both economic and political crises and increases in non-EU immigration to Italy. As Elizabeth Heineman has written of the postwar memory politics surrounding the mass rapes of German women by Allied soldiers in 1945:

Most remarkable was the appropriation of the female rape experience by the nation. Although discussion of women's experiences with rape by members of the victorious armies became taboo a few years after the end of the war, references to the rapes hardly disappeared. In fact, they permeated the culture. But they ceased to be references to rapes of women and instead turned into allusions to the rape of Germany.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

In the wake of the political crisis in Italy in the 1990s and the memorials marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, the Allied occupation of Italy during the Second World War became a topic of renewed interest, which can be seen in scholarly and non-scholarly works of history and in political discourse. Of particular interest to journalists and historians were the experiences of ordinary Italians during the war,

which included their interactions—often sexual and criminal—with Allied soldiers, particularly the French colonial and African American troops. While some of these works were self-declared attempts to rectify the hegemony of the anti-fascist Resistance narrative (and undeclared claims to rebalance the moral ledgers of the war) they often served express political purposes. In particular, as this chapter has demonstrated, the Allied occupation and the sexual disorder<sup>43</sup> that ensued during it—epitomised by the widespread rapes committed by the French colonial troops in Southern Lazio as well as by the interracial sex and prostitution that were apparently endemic to cities like Livorno and Naples—often functioned in these works as a metaphor for issues as various and far-reaching as the hypocrisy of the Italian left (and the Communist party in particular), the weak state of Italian national unity, Italy's enduring divide between North and South and most frequently it seems, Italian victimhood. Contemporary references to the occupation seem to have become particularly relevant in the context of Italy's recent economic and political crisis.

While some aspects of this historical trend were specific to the post-1989 period, others were not. Though claims of victimhood were utilised by different groups of Italians for different purposes in both the immediate postwar and post-1989 period, such claims invariably served to direct attention away from the period when the Italian government made decisions that led to war and invasion and to, instead, emphasise the moments when Italians lost control over their own destiny. In the postwar period, references to, and representations of, Italian women's encounters with the French colonial and African American soldiers, whether they were of a violent nature or not, frequently 'offered sympathetic images of victimization',<sup>44</sup> standing for a violation of the nation itself, of its values and morals, and its racial and sexual purity—meanings that were rooted in the past but that reflect certain continuities in postwar racial thought and conceptions of nation. After all, the presence of black soldiers on Italian soil during the occupation had not only signified the inversion of fascist-era racial hierarchies, undermining Italy's quest for a renewed and reinvigorated Italy, but it also apparently cemented Italy's inferior status vis-à-vis the Allies, particularly the United States.

## Notes

- 1 It should be noted that this right-wing coalition included Berlusconi's Forza Italia, Umberto Bossi's regionalist Northern League and Gianfranco Fini's AN. Scholarly works, too, proliferated on the topic.
- 2 See, for example, Silvana Patriarca, 'Italian Neopatriotism: Debating National Identity in the 1990s', *Modern Italy* Vol. 6, Issue 1 (2001): 21–34.
- 3 I borrow this term from Elizabeth Heineman, 'The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German National Identity', *The American Historical Review* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (1996): 356.

- 4 Robert S. C. Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture 1944–2010* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 151.
- 5 Nick Carter, *Modern Italy in Historical Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 178–83.
- 6 On the ‘really significant sea change in how Italians saw and remembered their uncongenial Fascist and wartime past, which occurred in the 1980s and 1990s’, see Philip Morgan, ‘“I was there, too”, memories of victimhood in wartime Italy’, *Modern Italy* Vol. 14, Issue 2 (2009): 217–31. On the resurgence of Italian neopatriotism in those years see Patriarca, ‘Italian Neopatriotism’ and Patriarca, ‘A Crisis of Italian National Identity? The Northern League and Italy’s Renationalization since the 1990s’, in *Crisis as Permanent Condition? The Italian Political System between Transition and Reform Resistance*, eds. Robert Kaiser, Christian Lahusen, and Andrea Schneiker (Baden: Nomos, 2006), 61–81.
- 7 The book was first published in 1965, though I have not been able to see this copy.
- 8 For more information on ANVCG see the organisation’s website *Associazione Nazionale Vittime Civili di Guerra*. Archived 2 February 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190202175713/http://www.anvcg.it/chi-siamo>. Today, the organisation seeks to promote a culture of peace through education and by honouring the memory of the fallen in wars. The organisation has published other historical books in addition to *Italia Martire* and it currently publishes a periodical called *Pace e Solidarietà*.
- 9 See also the related work on Allied sexual violence by journalist Fabrizio Carloni, *Il Corpo di Spedizione Francese in Italia, 1943–44* (Milano: Mursia, 2006), 50. Carloni states that the African American and French colonial troops were similar in the way that they committed sexual violence. He notes that both tended to commit rape in groups and after nightfall.
- 10 Giampaolo Pansa, *La guerra sporca dei partigiani e dei fascisti* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2012), 9.
- 11 Romano Bracalini, *Paisà: Vita quotidiana nell’Italia liberata dagli alleati* (Milano: Mondadori, 2008), 9.
- 12 Gigi Di Fiore, *Controstoria della liberazione: Le stragi e i crimini dimenticati degli Alleati nell’Italia del Sud* (Milano: BUR Rizzoli, 2012), Amazon ebook location 147.
- 13 *Ibid.*, location 42.
- 14 Bracalini, *Paisà*, 55.
- 15 See Bracalini, *Paisà*, 60, who is citing a postwar ministerial investigation, though there is no footnote. See also Gabriella Gribaudo, *Guerra totale: Tra bombe alleate e violenze naziste: Napoli e il fronte meridionale 1940–44* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006), 569. Gribaudo states that the number of rape victims was likely a few thousand. The Italian Ministry of Defence recorded 1,159 rapes committed by the Allied troops from 8 September 1943 to 30 September 1947 of which 1,035 were committed by the French colonial troops. See National Archives and Records Administration, RG 492, The Special Staff/Adjutant General, File 000.5, Entry 84, Box 815, Accidents and Crimes Committed by Allied Troops Against Italian Civilians and Military Personnel, 1947. See also Tommaso Baris and Giovanni Sabbatucci, *Tra due fuochi: esperienza e memoria della guerra lungo la linea Gustav* (Roma: Laterza, 2003), 98. Baris notes that, ‘The data of the Ministry of the Interior, collected a few months after the ‘liberation’, indicates that 3.100 women were victims of sexual violence by the Moroccan troops, but this was definitely less than the actual number of abuses. These were principally the women infected with venereal diseases (Gonorrhea, Syphilis) or those

- who got pregnant'. For other figures, see Daria Frezza, 'Cassino 1943–44: la memoria', *Passato e Presente* Vol. 22 (2004): 115–40 and Michela Ponzani, *Guerra alle donne: Partigiane, vittime di stupro, <<amanti del nemico>> 1940–45* (Torino: Einaudi, 2012), 236.
- 16 In his study of rape in the European Theater of Operations during the Second World War, J. Robert Lilly argues that statistics of reported rape crimes might only account for about 5% of the total number of crimes. See J. Robert Lilly, *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe during World War II* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 11.
- 17 Bracalini, *Paisà*, 64.
- 18 Ibid., 58.
- 19 Curzio Malaparte, *The Skin*, trans. David Moore (New York: New York Review of Books, 2013), 281–2. This book was originally published in 1949.
- 20 Bracalini, *Paisà*, 15.
- 21 Ibid., 119.
- 22 For example, according to a Military Police report of July 1947, which listed the hundreds of women arrested for prostitution in Livorno, the women hailed from cities across Italy, including Tuscany and northern Italy. M.P. Police Station, 'Prostitutes Arrested from 23 June 1947 to 23 July 1947', 28 July 1947, NARA RG 492 Entry UD-UP 266 Decimal File, Box 2192, .005.
- 23 Bracalini, *Paisà*, 191–7.
- 24 Ibid., 32–3.
- 25 Ibid., 39. Also see page 119.
- 26 Patriarca, 'Italian Neopatriotism', 24.
- 27 Di Fiore, *Controstoria della liberazione*, location 61.
- 28 See, for example, Bracalini, *Paisà*, 15–6. Bracalini stereotypes the Italians as fickle, unreliable and cowards.
- 29 He has, however, written about the 'marocchine' in other books. See Giampaolo Pansa, *I vinti non dimenticano: i crimini ignorati della nostra guerra civile* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2010).
- 30 Malaparte, *The Skin*, 77.
- 31 See, for example, Aldo Santini, *Tombolo Disertori, contrabbandieri, segnorine, sciuscì: un'avventura del dopoguerra* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1990), 15, 93.
- 32 Pansa, *Guerra Sporca*, 334.
- 33 See, Silvia Cassamagnaghi, *Operazione spose di guerra: Storie d'amore e di emigrazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2014), 111, for these statistics from a study by the American military.
- 34 Pansa, *Guerra Sporca*, 335.
- 35 For example, many of these authors do not distinguish between the value of a direct/indirect testimony and between one narrated during the war or immediately after and one narrated many years later. See, for example, Di Fiore, *Controstoria della liberazione*, location 2661.
- 36 Atina Grossmann has similarly argued that while the rapes perpetrated by the Red Army in Germany in 1945 were 'normalized' and 'downplayed' they were not completely silenced. See Grossman, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 57.
- 37 Giovanni De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore: Le memorie di un'Italia di-visa* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2011), 16–7.
- 38 Flavia Fiorentino, 'Sofia Loren contro AN: via la Ciociara dai manifesti anti stupro', *Corriere della Sera*, 28 June 2005. See also Luciano Celes, 'Back to the Future: The Visual Propaganda of the AN', *The Journal of Modern Italian Studies* Vol. 15, Issue 2 (March 2010): 232–311.



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- 41 See, for example, Goffredo Pistelli, 'Gli Stupratori Stiano Pure a Casa', *Italia Oggi*, 31 October 2013, [www.italiaoggi.it/archivio/gli-stupratori-stiano-pure-a-casa-1849009](http://www.italiaoggi.it/archivio/gli-stupratori-stiano-pure-a-casa-1849009).
- 42 Elizabeth Heineman, 'The Hour of the Woman', 368.
- 43 Ibid., 356.
- 44 Ibid., 388.

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*Figure 12.1* Jair Bolsonaro during participation in the Unica Forum on 18 June 2018. Marcelo Chello/Shutterstock.com.

## 12 ‘Long Live the Polarization’

### The Brazilian Radical Right and the Uses of the Past under Jair Bolsonaro

*Vinícius Bivar*

In September 2018, at the high of the electoral campaign that led Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency of Brazil, Ernesto Araújo, later Foreign Minister and member of the so-called ideological wing of Bolsonaro’s government, wrote a post in his personal blog titled ‘Viva a polarização’ [Long Live the Polarization]. In the text, Araújo attempts a philosophical reflection on the role of polarisation as an essential organising feature of human experience. According to the chancellor, it is ‘absurd to see in any aspect of reality, including in politics, a unipolar or multipolar situation’ calling these other forms of organisation ‘fantasies’ or ‘verbal make-believe’.<sup>1</sup>

While the argument developed by the Minister is controversial, polarisation is arguably one of the key components behind the rise of the far right in Brazil. Its origins are often attributed to the demonstrations that led millions to the streets in 2013. What began as a protest against a 0.20 cent hike in bus fares soon evolved into an amorphous movement with a myriad of agendas that gathered individuals ranging from the far left to the far right of the political spectrum. The initial impetus of the protests eventually waned; however, their impact on the popularity of President Dilma Rousseff was permanent.

Polarisation became evident in the electoral cycle of 2014. Although reelected, President Rousseff won by the closest margin since the reestablishment of direct elections in 1989. In a scenario of economic recession and with her Worker’s Party (PT) plagued by corruption allegations, anti-PT rhetoric [*antipetismo*] gained momentum exposing a previously unseen capability of the radical right to mobilise street demonstrations.

The past was not immune to the process of cumulative radicalisation of the present. Alternative narratives about the military regime were instrumentalised to antagonise President Rousseff and her party. Concomitantly, groups supportive of Jair Bolsonaro reclaimed anticommunist narratives typical of the 1930s and 1960s benefiting from the rising discontent with the PT administration. This chapter examines some of these uses of the past and their employment in the political discourses of the Brazilian radical right during the period of cumulative radicalisation that led Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency of Brazil.

## Rehabilitating Far-Right History

The process of re-democratisation that culminated with the first democratic election following the civil-military dictatorship in 1989 was marked by what General Ernesto Geisel described as a 'slow, gradual and safe' transition.<sup>2</sup> Already in the 1970s measures to ease censorship, reestablish political rights and grant amnesty to crimes committed during the years of civil-military rule were enacted as a form of securing a stable political environment for the return of power to civilians. The transition to democracy was to be made in an orderly manner, avoiding abrupt political changes and above all safeguarding the agents of the regime against criminal prosecution under the umbrella of a 'general and unrestricted' amnesty. Timothy J. Power described this process as 'conservative democratization', as many of the institutions and actors active during the dictatorship years remained involved in politics following the electoral cycle that brought Fernando Collor to the presidency.<sup>3</sup> Examples include the *Partido Democrático Social* (PDS) which replaced the *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* (ARENA), party of the government during the dictatorship years, and the *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (PMDB) which succeeded the homonymous organisation active as the tolerated opposition during the military regime.

Contrasting with the institutional continuity and the permanence of notorious political dynasties following the first democratic elections in 1989, official narratives about the dictatorship years soon began to be replaced by new ones critical of the military rule and that sought to embody the values of the newly reestablished democratic order. In literature as well as in history, Brazil entered a period of national reconciliation when, as described by Daniel Aarão Reis, torturers were left alone, nobody supported the dictatorship and the guerrillas active between 1966 and 1973 were converted into extreme defenders of democracy.<sup>4</sup> No politician or public figure wanted to be identified as a collaborator and even some who were active members of the ARENA sought to distance themselves from the image of supporters of the military rule. Being left-wing was also trendy. As political notions of left and right became increasingly constructed in relation to the military rule, the label right-wing lost its appeal producing a phenomenon that Maria do Carmo de Souza described as the 'ashamed right'.<sup>5</sup> In this context, right-wing politics became increasingly associated with authoritarianism and collaborationism and thus something to be avoided as Brazil entered a phase of post-authoritarian consensus that spanned more than two decades.

Throughout this period, however, alternative narratives about the regime were kept alive amongst military circles and pro-dictatorship radicals. In addition to celebratory speeches, narratives sympathetic to the regime were publicised through memoirs of former agents of the repression eager to expose the 'lies told by the left' about the 21 years of military

rule. Formerly confined to the fringes of political discourse, alternative narratives about the civil-military dictatorship were mainstreamed in recent years through right-wing blogs and social media pages and helped by the growing popularity of Bolsonaro. His 'bedside reading', as he termed it, is the book of memoirs by Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra titled '*A Verdade Sufocada*' [The Suffocated Truth]. Published in 2006, Ustra's memoirs became Brazil's number six best-selling book of non-fiction in 2016 following Bolsonaro's praise of the colonel's memory during the vote that opened impeachment proceeding against former president Dilma Rousseff who integrated resistance groups during the high of the military regime.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most active promoters of an alternative narrative about the civil-military dictatorship until his death in 2015, Ustra led between 1970 and 1974 the DOI-CODI of the Second Army located in São Paulo which served as an institution for the coordination of the repressive apparatus of the regime also functioning as a torture facility during the harshest years of the repression. During Ustra's tenure as head of the DOI-CODI/II Army, 55 victims were killed or disappeared from the facilities under his command and hundreds were reportedly tortured as part of the campaign against left-wing organisations and guerrilla groups in the state of São Paulo.<sup>7</sup> Despite Ustra's infamous biography, Bolsonaro, already in office as president, called the colonel a 'national hero' that prevented Brazil from falling into the hands of the left.<sup>8</sup>

With the rise of Bolsonaro and the new radical right in Brazil, Ustra's memoirs were introduced to an audience previously unfamiliar with alternative historical narratives about the military regime. *Suffocated Truth*, thus, became the standard reference for a new generation of radical right militants that had their first contact with radical right ideas through Bolsonaro and other radical right internet influencers that surround him. Ustra's narrative, however, presents in many aspects little novelty as it relies on the official discourse of the military regime occasionally incorporating his personal accounts about events that occurred during his tenure as head of the DOI-CODI and afterwards. For instance, in explaining the origins of the movement that overthrew president João Goulart in 1964, Ustra argues the case that, instead of a coup d'état, the military directed a 'counter-revolution' against the imminent threat of a communist uprising.<sup>9</sup>

The threat of a communist revolution was one of the central elements from which the regime derived the legitimacy of its actions. As early as November 1964 a special edition of the monthly magazine *Seleções do Reader's Digest* published an article titled 'The nation that saved itself' which argued: 'rarely has a great nation been so close to disaster and recovered than Brazil in its recent triumph over the red subversion', concluding that 'total surrender seemed imminent'.<sup>10</sup> The article was reedited by the Library of the Brazilian Army in 1978, fourteenth

anniversary of the coup, and while not made widely available in print, it was shared with the orientation for readers to spread the message that the military had saved Brazil from communism in 1964. In a country where illiteracy rates reached more than 30% of the population, this was done mostly through celebratory speeches, some restricted to the military, others directed at the general public.<sup>11</sup>

Bolsonaro referenced the 'red threat' argument on several occasions. In the early 2000s, while still a backbencher in the Brazilian parliament, Bolsonaro often referred to communism as way to appeal to his base, namely soldiers and officials of the army and the military police in Rio de Janeiro. In 2005 he paid homage to the army officers who died during the persecution of guerrilla groups, in particular the notorious *Guerrilha do Araguaia*, stating: 'As those who fought in World War II fought the good fight. In Italy, freed the world from Nazi-fascism. In Araguaia, freed Brazil from communism'.<sup>12</sup> More recently, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the military coup, Bolsonaro stood beside a sign that read 'Congratulations Military – March 31, 1964. Thanks to you Brazil is not Cuba'.<sup>13</sup>

Like Ustra, Bolsonaro echoes the official narrative of the regime also claiming that a military intervention represented the will of the people. The article in the *Reader's Digest*, as well as Ustra's memoirs, highlights the public demonstrations occurred only a few days prior to the coup as evidence of wide popular support for military action against the Goulart government. They point in particular to the *Marcha da Família com Deus pela Liberdade* and the subsequent *Marcha da Vitória* which brought together more than a million people to the street of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, respectively. Ustra describes the *Marcha da Família* as 'a response from the civilian population to (sic) the reestablishment of the threatened order and civic values'. According to Ustra, 'people spoke openly that by 1 May Brazil would have been completely communized [comunizado]'.<sup>14</sup> Bolsonaro also referenced the *Marcha da Família* in his infamous celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the coup when he praised the Catholic Church and the women who played key roles in the organisation of the 1964 marches. In that same year, 2014, approximately a thousand far-right militants and sympathisers reenacted the *Marcha da Família* roaming the streets of São Paulo chanting pro-dictatorship slogans that included 'We don't want elections, we want [military] intervention'.<sup>15</sup>

The arguments espoused by Bolsonaro and derived from the celebratory literature written about the regime find little support in the existing historiography. However, transposed to the present they play an important role in eroding the democratic consensus that formed in the aftermath of the military regime. For almost 30 years the critical assessment of the dictatorship that emerged during the re-democratisation period combined with its association to the right of the political spectrum kept

the far-right 'ashamed'. Reestablishing the right, and most importantly the radical right, as a legitimate force in Brazilian politics required, therefore, one of two alternatives: either a dissociation between the military regime and the far right or a revision of the historical narratives that lie at the core of the Brazilian democratic consensus. As torchbearer of the radical right in Brazil and retired army captain, Bolsonaro chose the latter. Throughout his political career he promoted alternative interpretations of history, such as those by colonel Ustra and sought to disqualify critical analysis of the 21 years of military dictatorship referring to them as 'lies told by the left'.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, however, Bolsonaro's far-right worldview found a fertile ground in the growing distrust in democratic institutions felt not only in Brazil but also underlying the rise of the radical right in other parts of the world, most prominently Europe and the United States.<sup>17</sup> In the Brazilian case this trend gained further traction due to the prolonged recession, political crisis and corruption scandals that since 2014 became more pronounced in the Brazilian political debates.<sup>18</sup>

### Imagining the Enemy

Central to the group cohesion in far-right movements across the globe, the image of the 'other' or the 'enemy' is also an integral part of Bolsonaro's appeal among the more radicalised segments of his base. As with other examples within the populist radical right, Bolsonaro marketed himself as an antiestablishment politician, who would fight 'political correctness' and 'govern for the majority' against the interests of minorities, traditional political elites and the government-controlled media.<sup>19</sup> Through his speeches, Bolsonaro pursued a narrative that placed the PT, in power since 2003, as the nexus between the groups he antagonised. He attacked the PT for its 'ideological bias' often resorting to infamous statements mostly targeted at Afro-Brazilians, women and LGBT communities consolidating through the years his image as the nemesis of the PT and the ideas it represented. As corruption scandals and economic stagnation affected the credibility of the party, Bolsonaro's anti-PT discourse gained momentum among broader segments of the Brazilian public. Here again, narratives about history played a crucial role in making the PT the enemy from which the country should be defended.

As with his defence of the dictatorship, Bolsonaro's discourse against the PT went through a process of cumulative radicalisation intensified between 2014 and 2016, peak of the political crisis that led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. While earlier speeches demonstrate greater concern for his electoral base and the defence of the honour of the Brazilian armed forces, recent statements evidence a convergence between an anti-PT sentiment (*antipetismo*) fuelled by the party's credibility crisis and a tradition of anticommunist thinking that dates back



to the 1930s. Since the 1920s, following the Russian Revolution, the instrumentalisation of communism as an existential threat to Brazilian sovereignty was a constant. Historian Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, however, identifies three moments in which the threat from the 'agents of Moscow' permeated public discourse in a more aggressive manner. The first coincides with the aftermath of the communist uprising of November 1935. While promptly repressed by the regime of President Getúlio Vargas, the 1935 uprising was converted in the following years into a powerful tool of propaganda used to legitimise the establishment by Vargas of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship in 1937. A second moment of virulent anticommunism occurred in the early days of the Cold War between 1946 and 1948, brief period when the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) had its status as a legal political party reinstated. The third 'wave' of anticommunism, as these periods were termed by the author, preceded the coup d'état that brought the generals to power in 1964.<sup>20</sup> The first and third 'waves of anticommunism' are particularly relevant to the author as they produced authoritarian solutions as a response to the perception, real or not, that a communist revolution in Brazil was imminent.

In common these 'waves' share what Motta termed 'ideological matrixes of anticommunism', in other words, sets of ideas and social actors that provided the foundation for the creation and diffusion of anticommunist discourses during the different periods covered by Motta's analysis. According to the author, nationalism, liberalism and Catholicism are the underlying 'matrixes' that provided the ideological basis for Brazilian anticommunism.<sup>21</sup> The arguments advocated by each of these groups are hardly unique to Brazilian politics. Influences from Western Europe, in particular France and Germany, in the 1930s and the United States during the heydays of the Cold War are noticeable in many of the images evoked by Brazilian anticommunist in each of the above-mentioned periods. They were, however, transposed and applied to a local context which often required adaptations to the specificities of Brazilian politics. An analysis of Bolsonaro's *antipetista* rhetoric reveals he mobilised many of the same 'matrixes' and arguments utilised during previous 'waves of anticommunism'. With adaptations to better capture the specificities of current Brazilian politics, Bolsonaro capitalised on nationalism, liberalism and Catholicism to convey his message to voters within and without the radical right.

Until the final years of the First World War, manifestations of nationalism in Brazil were incipient. Earlier attempts to coin a sense of collective belonging among Brazilian had little impact beyond the aristocratic circles thinking the Brazilian nation and its symbols. The sinking of the merchant vessel *Paraná* by German submarines in 1917, on the other hand, sparked a sense of Brazilianness unseen until that point. Xenophobic demonstrations against Germans and their descendants

forced the resignation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Lauro Müller, a German-Brazilian, and triggered violent protests targeting German schools, associations and breweries.<sup>22</sup> With the end of the war, communism became a target of Brazilian nationalism. Common accusations against Brazilian communists included claims of treason and insidious weakening of the nation by dividing it into classes and compromising its unicity through the adoption of an internationalist doctrine symbolised by the notorious quote from the Communist Manifesto 'workers of the world, unite!'. They were also accused of owing allegiance to a foreign power, namely the USSR, and threatening the sacredness of the national symbols, for example, by willing to replace the national flag with the hammer and sickle.<sup>23</sup>

Bolsonaro and his followers evoked a similar imagery in their description of the PT. Wearing the yellow jersey of the national soccer team and carrying Brazilian flags, supporters of Bolsonaro took the street in several occasions inspired by slogans such as 'our flag will never be red', slogan repeated by Bolsonaro in his inauguration speech to which he added 'it will only be red if our blood is needed to keep it green and yellow'.<sup>24</sup> Once again the image of the imminent threat of a communist revolution, this time associated with the PT, served as a mobilisation strategy driving its momentum from the polarised environment of Brazilian politics post-2013. Left-wing internationalism also preserved its relevance within the Brazilian far-right discourse. With the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, however, far-right narratives about left internationalism shifted into a regional lens. Cuba and, most importantly, the current regime in Venezuela became the external references of the Brazilian radical right serving as cautionary tales of what could possibly happen to Brazil in case the PT returned to power. Theories about the *Foro de São Paulo*, a forum created in 1990 with the assistance of the PT to congregate left-wing parties in Latin America, replaced the Communist International as symbol of allegiance of the left to institutions other than the nation. Self-proclaimed philosopher and intellectual guru of Jair Bolsonaro, Olavo de Carvalho, wrote extensively about the threat posed by the *Foro* crediting to its influence the orchestration of the 'most spectacular and overwhelming leftist expansion witnessed in the continent'.<sup>25</sup> He offers, however, little support to substantiate his claims.

Liberal criticisms to the PT also found a fertile ground among Bolsonaro's supporters in the 2018 electoral cycle. During the campaign, arguments about the inefficiency of state-owned companies and economic liberalisation mingled with moral imperatives of religious conservatism and groups that previously had little in common began to advocate for a common platform. An admitted ignorant in economic affairs, Bolsonaro had never, prior to 2018, suggested sympathy for economic liberalism

in his year as a congressman. On the contrary, Bolsonaro had a history of supporting corporatist privileges and voting against initiatives that reduce state participation in the economy, most notably the privatisation of oil giant Petrobras and the pension system reform, both measures he now vows will be accomplished during his presidency. Bolsonaro's track record as a congressman produced an initial resistance against his candidacy with liberal think-tanks such as the Instituto Liberal and the Ilisp advising against a vote for Bolsonaro.<sup>26</sup> He managed, however, to obtain at least a critical support to his economic agenda as he announced, still during the campaign, Chicago trained economist Paulo Guedes as his minister of finance.

Conversely, other movements within the liberal spectrum adopted a more sympathetic stance towards Bolsonaro's agenda since 2014. That was the case of *Movimento Brasil Livre* (MBL) which, through their massive social network following, drove thousands to the street of São Paulo in 2015 to call for the impeachment of President Rousseff.<sup>27</sup> An admirer of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, young Kim Kataguiri, who spearheads the movement, describes the PT as 'nemesis of freedom and democracy' and advocates for ideals he describes as liberal-conservative which incorporated, after the ousting of President Rousseff in 2016, elements typical of the far-right 'culture war' discourse.<sup>28</sup> While utilising a similar rhetoric, the MBL is less explicit than Bolsonaro in associating the PT with communism. They benefited, however, of the 'red scare' promoted by the other groups, nationalists and religious conservatives, to portray liberalism as the antithesis of socialism, therefore instilling economic liberalism into Bolsonaro's far-right rhetoric. When compared to historic iterations of liberal anticommunism, nonetheless, discursive similarities rely more on core principles of economic liberalism than in overt criticisms of socialist and communist economic systems.

Appropriations of the existing anticommunist tradition among religious conservatives, on the other hand, are plentiful within Bolsonaro's core electorate. Differently from previous moments, however, Pentecostal churches instead of Catholics took the centre stage as a stronghold of support for Bolsonaro. With a solid presence in parliament already in previous legislations, Pentecostal leaders established themselves as vehement opponents of what they consider to be attacks against Judeo-Christian morals and the sacredness of the family embodied by the LGBT and abortion rights legislative propositions attributed to the left and above all by the PT administrations. As stated by Pastor Silas Malafaia, one of the well-known leaderships within the Pentecostal community, Bolsonaro 'is in favor of family values, he is against this criminal practice of eroticizing children that the left wants'.<sup>29</sup> Malafaia relates the current left-wing parties in Brazil to the Soviet Union accusing them of being against 'freedom of religion, and the individual freedom of movement' reprising the criticism to communist as atheist and anti-church.<sup>30</sup>

While currently espoused by Pentecostal evangelicals, the arguments mentioned earlier have deep roots in the Catholic tradition. As early as 1846, Pope Pius IX proposed the condemnation of the 'nefarious doctrine of communism' which would lead, if accepted, to the 'complete destruction of everyone's laws, government, property, and even of human society'.<sup>31</sup> The principle of communism as an existential threat to the organisation of society influenced subsequent documents from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; however, it was the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* from 1937 that offered a doctrinaire reference to Catholic anticommunism. In the document, Pope Pius XI declared as aims of 'atheistic communism' the 'upsetting of the social order' and the undermining of the 'very foundations of Christian civilization'.<sup>32</sup> These encyclicals served as guidelines for the Brazilian clergy attitudes towards communism. In particular, during the 1930s and first decades of the Cold War, priests acted as promoters of the principle that communism was an enemy by using their sermons and writing books to pass on this message to the faithful. Nonetheless, in the 1960s, growing concerns emerged as a left-wing group emerged within Brazilian Catholicism. The official position of the Church, however, remained aligned with the orientations coming from the Holy See with priests and bishops playing an active role in the aforementioned *Marcha da Família* and supporting the authoritarian solution in 1964.<sup>33</sup>

Although adapted to new context, the discourses that constituted the ideological basis for the election of Bolsonaro relied on the foundations coined by Brazil's anticommunist tradition. Bolsonaro proved that the imagery of communism as a threat remains alive and capable of mobilising Brazilian conservatism against the parties and institutions accused of espousing communist ideas.

## Concluding Remarks

The past was not immune to the wave of polarisation that emerged from the massive demonstrations in 2013. Jair Bolsonaro, as well as the groups who offered ideological support to his candidacy, relied in different degrees on the construction of narratives about that past to provide justification and legitimacy to their individual and collective political projects. They also reflect a presidential campaign that emphasised the rejection of the political adversaries as a strategy to build cohesion among voters. The fear of a comeback of the Worker's Party, equated on occasions with the return of communism, added to the dissatisfaction with the massive corruption scandals and the challenging economic situation elements that were decisive to the victory of Jair Bolsonaro in October 2018.

In the contexts analysed in this chapter, narratives about the past, in particular decontextualised accounts of the military regime, played a dual role. On the one hand, they contributed to normalising far-right

rhetoric and undermining the democratic consensus that formed the foundation of the longest democratic period in Brazilian history. On the other hand, they promoted a resurgence of arguments associated with the long tradition of anticommunist thinking that allowed for the imagining of a monstrous threat that put into question, according to Bolsonaro's most avid supporters, the very foundation of civilisation understood by them as a product of will of the nation combined with Judeo-Christian values and morals.

Since taking office in 1 January 2019, little appears to have changed. President Bolsonaro remains faithful to the rhetoric that elected him in 2018; however, it appears that the candidate's rhetoric does produce the same effect in the mouth of president. Many of the issues that were at the core of the downfall of the PT remain unresolved—taking a toll on Bolsonaro's popularity. Besides, the attempt to accommodate the interests of the diverse groups that supported his candidacy, already in the early days of the government, promoted an atmosphere of political infighting among the different nuclei that composes Bolsonaro's cabinet allies who were decisive during the campaign, including members of his own party, have now turned their backs on the president. Yet, while it is still too early for an assessment of Bolsonaro's presidency, it is safe to state that the discourses he espoused will influence the Brazilian political debate for years to come.

## Notes

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- 4 Daniel Aarão Reis, "Ditadura, Anistia E Reconciliação," *Estudos Históricos (Rio De Janeiro)* 23, no. 45 (2010), 179–80. See also Carla Simone Roddeghero, "Anistia, Esquecimento, Conciliação e Reconciliação: Tensões no Tratamento da Herança da Ditadura no Brasil," in *Marcas Da Memória: História Oral Da Anistia No Brasil* (Recife: Editora Universitária UFPE, 2012), 103.
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- 8 "Bolsonaro Afirma Que Torturador Brilhante Ustra é um 'herói Nacional'," *Veja*, 8 August 2019. Archived 3 September 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190903091845/https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/bolsonaro-afirma-que-torturador-brilhante-ustra-e-um-heroi-nacional/>.
- 9 Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, *A Verdade Sufocada: A História Que a Esquerda Não Quer Que O Brasil Conheça* (Brasília: Editora Ser, 2007), 66.
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- 17 See for example the results obtained by Pew Research on the levels of satisfaction with democracy: Pew Research Center, 'Many Across the Globe are Dissatisfied with How Democracy is Working' (April 2019)
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- 21 Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, *Em Guarda Contra O Perigo Vermelho: O Anticomunismo No Brasil, 1917–1964* (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Editora Perspectiva, 2002), 17.
- 22 Frederik Schulze. *Auswanderung Als Nationalistisches Projekt: ‘Deutschtum’ Und Kolonialdiskurse Im südlichen Brasilien 1824–1941* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 198. Also Glen Goodman, “From ‘German Danger’ to German-Brazilian President: Immigration, Ethnicity, and the Making of Brazilian Identities, 1924–1974” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2015), 40.
- 23 Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, *Em Guarda Contra O Perigo Vermelho: O Anticomunismo No Brasil, 1917–1964* (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Editora Perspectiva, 2002), 31.
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**Part III**

# **History of the Future**

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# 13 Hate Groups and Greco-Roman Antiquity Online

## To Rehabilitate or Reconsider?

*Curtis Dozier*

In November 2016 Donna Zuckerberg, the editor-in-chief of *Eidolon*, an online journal of feminism and Classics, published an article calling attention to the appropriation of Greco-Roman antiquity by contemporary white supremacists and other hate groups.<sup>1</sup> Zuckerberg's article contained some recommendations for professional scholars of Classics, including a wish for a website devoted to documenting examples of contemporary hate groups enlisting antiquity in support of their ideology. A year later I launched *Pharos: Doing Justice to the Classics* (pharosclassics.org) with two aims related to Zuckerberg's call: first, to raise awareness about how hate groups appropriate antiquity, and second, to provide a platform for specialists to comment on the omissions, distortions and errors in the version of ancient history being propagated by the sites we document. We raise awareness by documenting such appropriations on our site, and then we reach out to a range of specialists working on related topics, call their attention to the appropriation we have documented and ask for brief comment. We then synthesise these responses into a single, collaborative response that is freely and easily accessible to anyone who visits the site.

In some ways it is an innovative approach, but in others it extends work already being done. There is a growing body of research on the role that ancient Greco-Roman history and the discipline of Classical Studies itself have played in bolstering imperialist, colonialist and otherwise oppressive movements in the past: two recent examples include *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany*, published in 2018, and *Greco-Roman Antiquity and the Idea of Nationalism in the 19th Century* (2016). This use of ancient history did not, however, end with the defeat of the Third Reich. The database of contemporary appropriations of antiquity by hate groups that we are compiling at *Pharos* demonstrates the persistence into the contemporary world of many of these hateful versions of Greco-Roman history.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, to peruse our database of more than 400 (and growing) such appropriations is to realise that in a very real sense a vision of Greco-Roman antiquity informed by historical fact may be more properly called 'alt-history' than that vision which *Pharos* documents, because the latter is currently so widely available online.

To date, *Pharos* has published 70 articles that have been viewed more than 110,000 times: the publication of this volume provides a welcome opportunity to reflect on that work in relation to the question of how these movements re-write history to suit their political purposes. My team at *Pharos* remains committed to exposing various kinds of inaccuracies and revisionism in these groups' use of history, but our work has brought us to the recognition that this kind of response constitutes only part of what can, and should, be done in the face of such appropriations. In fact, many of the sites we document do not 'revise' our understanding of antiquity in any meaningful way: ancient authors *do* voice support for many of the positions adopted by hate groups; ancient Greek and Roman society does provide models for oppressive hierarchies. Thus, noting and correcting errors of fact and interpretation can only be a first step when responding to such appropriations. Such corrections are, on their own, of limited effectiveness in combatting these ideologies, which mould the past to fit their ideological positions rather than revise their positions to fit historical fact. Put another way, our corrections are unlikely to convince a white supremacist that ancient Greece cannot be used to support his position. Our audience, then, are those curious about antiquity but who have not considered its symbolic politics, or those who are uncomfortable with the political uses to which something they love is being put. With these audiences in mind, while also being cognizant of the tension between the need for a critical assessment of history and the desire to promote the study of that history as a worthwhile endeavour, we at *Pharos* attempt to compile responses that allow the hateful arguments we document to prompt critical reflection on mainstream (not just far-right) narratives about the study of the Greco-Roman past, as a means of developing a new narrative in which the study of history contributes to the articulation of inclusive and liberatory politics.

### **Greco-Roman Antiquity as a Model for Hatred**

Greco-Roman antiquity appeals to hate groups because of the prestige those ancient civilisations enjoy in the popular imagination, where they are frequently regarded as providing some kind of foundation for the modern world and as representing the acme of artistic and cultural achievement.<sup>3</sup> Hate groups aim to attach this prestige to their own political ideas by finding analogues in classical material. Often, they present the ancient world as a model that we should attempt to emulate. For example, the neo-Fascist group *Patriot Front*'s 'manifesto' declares that America should abandon republican-style government in favour of dictatorship because 'the time of the Republic has passed in America, as the system grows too weak to do its duty'.<sup>4</sup> The neo-Nazi site *Counter-Currents* published an article arguing that racist monuments commemorating the Confederate States of America should be allowed to remain

in place because the Confederacy 'represented a continuation of the Classical [Greek] worldview that was based on tradition, hierarchy, and ordered inequality' (the latter being a euphemism for state-sanctioned domination of white citizens over others).<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the specific views of classical authors are presented as views that we should hold: a contributor to a misogynist site argued that because the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote that women are inferior to men,<sup>6</sup> they really are inferior to men,<sup>7</sup> and an article on a site that promotes the pseudo-scientific, racist theory of 'human biodiversity'<sup>8</sup> recommends the homophobic, xenophobic and misogynist attitudes found in the poetry of the Roman satirist Juvenal, especially in his second, third and sixth satires.<sup>9</sup> In these and many other cases, antiquity is cited to authorise some contemporary political position: the reasoning is that because the ancient Greeks and/or Romans believed or practiced something, we should practice it too.

A different version of this idealisation is found in instances where antiquity is invoked as a negative model, as a warning against some contemporary practice or belief. The most common reference point for this argument is the collapse of the Roman Empire. Despite the complex and manifold ways of explaining the end of that political system,<sup>10</sup> various xenophobic sites blame its demise on the extension of citizenship rights and the increasing reliance on non-citizen mercenary troops by the Roman army. This simplistic narrative provides a convenient way for such sites to warn readers about the dangers of inclusive immigration policies, or, more specifically, of granting citizenship to those who complete military service.<sup>11</sup> We have also documented a misogynist site that blames feminism for the fall of the Roman Empire.<sup>12</sup> Although these arguments point to failures (from the perspective of those articulating them) in ancient society, they nevertheless assume an idealisation of the past, since the claim that Rome provides a warning in the present is only persuasive to an audience that regards the dissolution of Rome's empire as a tragedy that should have been avoided if possible.<sup>13</sup> Rome only works as a proxy for a modern state in a nationalist argument if one can assume the same amount of admiration for Rome as for the modern state in question.

*Pharos* has also found ancient Greece being used in this way by white supremacists who claim, based on a discredited theory going back to the nineteenth century, that Greece was colonised in antiquity by 'Nordic' invaders, sometimes called the 'Dorians', to bring the theory into accordance with ancient myths of population migration.<sup>14</sup> Everything that has traditionally been admired about Classical Greece, the line of thinking goes, should be attributed to the influence of these racially pure invaders, and the supposed decline of that culture should, in turn, be attributed to the dilution, as these sites would describe it, of the 'race-soul' of these invaders through intermarriage with the indigenous Mediterranean population.<sup>15</sup> In this argument we see Ancient Greece being

invoked as both a positive and negative model, but as with invocations of the decline of Rome even the negative argument depends on a fundamental assumption of admiration for that culture, since the 'decline' of Greece is only worth talking about if it marked the loss of something valuable.

The sites that *Pharos* documents are riddled with omissions of ancient evidence and distortions of scholarly publications, as well as errors and outright lies. Sometimes these errors reflect gross ignorance of the material being discussed, as when a misogynist site published a post admiring the mythological hero Heracles as a model of masculinity with an image, taken from a video game, that transliterated the anglicised form of the hero's name ('Hercules') in ancient Greek characters in a way that no Greek speaker would recognise.<sup>16</sup> More often, however, the errors take place at a more methodological level. It is common to find references to outdated scholarship, as when white supremacists cite the 1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica to support their view that the ancient Greeks were 'Nordic',<sup>17</sup> or when they cite an article from *The American Historical Review* of 1916 by a then-prominent ancient historian arguing that 'the fact that the people who built Rome had given way to a different race' can explain 'Rome's disintegration'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it is probably better to refer to such references as distortions rather than errors, since they are clearly ideologically motivated rather than the result of ignorance of more recent work. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of the neo-Nazi leader Jeff Schoep, who has written about the need to 'rebrand' white supremacy by abandoning symbols associated with Adolf Hitler such as the swastika and the brown shirt uniforms. One such 'rebranding' was Schoep's insistence at an April 2018 rally that the Nazi salute, familiar from images of Nazi rallies, should be known as the 'Roman salute' because, Schoep said, it originated in ancient Rome. This claim, made by many white supremacists before Schoep, has been investigated by Martin Winkler, who finds no ancient evidence for such a gesture and traces its association with Rome to an eighteenth-century painting depicting the moment in Roman mythological history when the three brothers Horatii agree to fight duels as representatives of Rome, with, in the painting, raised arms.<sup>19</sup> Such ideological preferences can also lead to perverse misreadings of evidence. For example, Adonis Georgiadis, a Greek politician who has persecuted the gay community in Greece, has published a book arguing that it is a 'myth' that in ancient Greece erotic relationships between men were common and, in many contexts, celebrated. This claim flies in the face of overwhelming evidence and a well-established scholarly consensus,<sup>20</sup> which is dismissed by one white nationalist site reviewing the book as the work of 'pro-homosexual' ideologues.<sup>21</sup> An even more extreme example of rejecting scholarly consensus is a whole series of posts on misogynist sites that argue that descriptions of ancient Greece

and Rome as patriarchal societies<sup>22</sup> are intended to erase the long history of ‘misandry’ and that ancient Greece and Rome should be considered predecessors to our own supposedly ‘gynocentric’ culture.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Limits of Refutation**

It is undoubtedly satisfying, as a scholar, to point out these errors and distortions. But even setting aside the fact that none of these corrections are likely to change the minds of those who advocate these hateful positions—the dismissal of scholars as themselves ideologically motivated is too easy a response—addressing such factual errors is often to misunderstand the role that antiquity plays in the articulation of these arguments. Take the case of the white supremacist Augustus Sol Invictus, who was born Austin Gillespie but legally changed his name before going on to speak at the ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville, Virginia where in 2017 self-identified white supremacist killed the counter-protester Heather Heyer and injured 19 others by hitting them with his car. Sol Invictus later ran, unsuccessfully, for the United States Senate in Florida.<sup>24</sup> His choice of name can be analysed, and criticised, from a historical point of view. The name Augustus connects him with the first emperor and one of the icons of Mussolini’s fascist movement, which painted itself as a restoration of the Roman Empire.<sup>25</sup> The name ‘Sol Invictus’ is less familiar but might be intended to create a connection between the modern politician and the third-century Roman emperor Aurelian, who enjoyed extensive military success after several decades of division within and invasion without the Roman Empire; one of Aurelian’s tactics to unify the Empire was to promote the worship of the god Sol Invictus (‘unconquered sun’), a god that appealed to a diverse range of peoples living under Roman rule.<sup>26</sup> If this were Augustus Sol Invictus’ intention in selecting the name, however, he also unwittingly selected a name that symbolically undermines his authority: a different deity known as ‘Sol Invictus’ was associated with the emperor Elagabalus (reigned 218–222 CE), who had been the high priest of that god before his ascension to the throne. This deity was a Semitic god, and so fits uneasily with the modern politician’s anti-Semitic ideology, and Elagabalus himself is hardly an icon of the virtues that white supremacists admire. He is vilified in the ancient biographical tradition for his supposed decadence and moral perversion, and more recently he has been given a more sympathetic treatment by those who would see him as providing an ancient model of a transgendered or transsexual ruler.<sup>27</sup>

Specialists and those already opposed to Augustus Sol Invictus’ politics may enjoy recognising such dissonance in his invocation of antiquity, but ultimately it seems unlikely that he thought very carefully about the associations, positive or negative (from his point of view), he would create between himself and relatively unfamiliar figures from the post-classical



world. Much more plausible is that he chose the name not for any specific historical referent (at least in the case of 'Sol Invictus') but because of the way it would intersect with common narratives of the idealisation of Rome as a place of triumphant (not to say 'unconquered') military strength as well as of a certain admirable grandiosity (Augustus means 'revered'). A reference to the sun (Latin 'Sol') could appeal to Christians, who have since antiquity identified Christ with the sun, while still intersecting with Augustus Sol Invictus' affiliation with paganism; this flexibility of meaning allows him to straddle the divide in the white supremacist community between Christians (such as those in the Ku Klux Klan) and those who identify with a pre-Christian, more 'Aryan' history. Whether 'Sol Invictus' refers to the deity promoted by Aurelian or the one worshipped by Elagabalus is beside the point. As long as antiquity is idealised then his invocation 'works', however incoherent it may be.

But there is a further, and more significant, way that 'pointing out the howlers', as the prominent Classicist Mary Beard exhorted historians to do in a piece on her *Times Literary Supplement* blog about far-right appropriations of Latin oratory,<sup>28</sup> sidesteps the central issue in the appropriation of classical antiquity by hate groups. Although these groups make many errors, there are also many ways in which ancient material does, without distortion or falsification, support their positions. It is not possible, without being tendentious, to dispute that many ancient Greek city-states featured the 'ordered inequality' that the neo-Nazi site described earlier says the American confederacy continued. One can dispute the issue of continuity; one can dispute whether antiquity should be used as a positive model in this way; but ancient society, by and large, was anything but egalitarian.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, we ourselves should resist the temptation to try to make antiquity more politically palatable. I referred earlier to a website arguing that because the Latin poet Juvenal articulated misogynist, homophobic and xenophobic views, we should hold those views as well. Juvenal is a satirist, and there is a large body of scholarship exploring how his poetry undermines its own arguments: for example, the contradictions in the speech of the speaker of the xenophobic and homophobic third satire reveal him to be, in the words of one critic, 'a jaundiced failure' and 'a manifestation of the petty greed and jealousy which haunts the city of Rome'.<sup>30</sup> This interpretation, which is very sensitive to the rhetoric of the piece and the traditions of the satiric genre, provides an appealing response to the racist sites that invoke Juvenal because the authors on those sites resemble the narrator that, on this reading, is the butt of Juvenal's joke. But this interpretation does not definitively turn the satire against them; at most it shows that we cannot, with certainty, identify the historical Juvenal's position on foreigners in Rome or erotic relationships between men from reading his poetry. If anything, it seems more likely that an author of literature for elite audiences (as the learnedness and technical polish of Juvenal's

poetry suggests he was) would reflect rather than criticise the dominant cultural assumptions of the time. So, while scholarship can reduce the certainty of such invocations of Juvenal, it cannot exclude the possibility that those websites are, in fact, understanding Juvenal correctly.

The Greek philosopher Plato provides an even more challenging case for anyone who wishes to try to counter hate groups' appropriation of the past. The same site that argued for continuity between the 'ordered inequality' of ancient Greece and the American Confederacy published an article pointing out similarities between Platonic thought and the tenets of National Socialism as practiced under Hitler. According to the article, 'Plato and Hitler saw the sublime rays of the same glorious Sun'.<sup>31</sup> This is a provocative formulation for anyone accustomed to revere Plato as one of the most important thinkers in human history. And yet the article has not substantially distorted views expressed in Plato's *Republic*, in which the speaker Socrates does, as the article says, criticise egalitarian politics (authoritarian rule being the preferred political system of white supremacists) and promote something that sounds very much like more modern eugenic practices that promoted selective breeding of humans. For example, in a discussion of the social structure of his ideal city, Socrates suggests that 'we should bring up the children of the best, but not the children of the worst', and goes on to say that 'the children of inferior parents, or any deformed specimen born to the [good parents], will be removed from sight into some secret and hidden place, as is right'.<sup>32</sup> Scholars have debated whether Plato intends this second passage to be understood as a euphemism for infanticide or whether he simply means that such children should be brought up outside of the system reserved for the 'best' children,<sup>33</sup> but either way Socrates has articulated a hierarchical preference for certain kind of children over others, and has equated the 'children of inferior parents' with 'deformed' ones: as one critic writes, even if Plato 'does not explicitly recommend that they are to be killed... his determination to exclude them from society and to make no allowance for their [upbringing] suggests that he wished them to be non-existent'.<sup>34</sup>

It is possible to argue that Socrates and Plato are not really advocating what they seem to advocate. Just as scholars have debated whether the speakers in Juvenal's poetry represent the poet's own views, there is a long-standing debate—going back to antiquity, in fact<sup>35</sup>—about whether Socrates in the dialogues functions as a mouthpiece for Plato's own views or not, and concurrently, whether Plato intended everything Socrates says in the dialogues to be accepted. But as with Juvenal, and indeed, to an even greater extent since Juvenal is not regarded as an important contributor to 'serious' thought in the way that Plato is, the neo-Nazi interpretation of the *Republic* is the one that follows the straightforward, surface meaning of the text (in the sense of taking seriously what the main character recommends); indeed it is the same interpretation as that of early nineteenth-century eugenicists, and later,

of Nazis such as Fritz Lenz, who found support for their ideas in the *Republic* and other ancient texts.<sup>36</sup> Those who would rehabilitate Plato, politically, must rely on an ironic or self-undermining reading (under which we are invited to resist or reject what the main character recommends). It takes a lot of interpretive work to persuade anyone that Socrates' advocacy of eugenics in the *Republic* isn't meant seriously,<sup>37</sup> whereas the hate groups can point simply to Socrates' words.

The historical Plato was affiliated by family and social ties to aristocratic politics; his cousin Critias was a member of the military junta known as the 'Thirty Tyrants', which the victorious Spartans installed in Athens after its defeat in the Peloponnesian war. These associations make an ironic interpretation of the elitist political positions of Plato's Socrates less likely to be right. And so, although the ironic reading is certainly a possible one, using it to counter those who find support for eugenics in the *Republic* runs the risk of minimising politically unpalatable aspects of Plato's thought, and even of protecting the same idealised vision of the classical past that white supremacists rely on in order to argue that because Plato endorses eugenics, we should too. As long as antiquity is admired, it can be enlisted in support of hateful politics.

### Reclaiming the Past

Classical scholars who wish to oppose hate groups' appropriations of the classical past thus face a dilemma: on the one hand the most obvious response would be to attempt to demolish the respectability of that past in order to undermine the basis of such appropriations; on the other hand, the discipline benefits from that idealisation, which would be hard to give up at a cultural moment when many in Classics (and the humanities more generally) perceive the very survival of our discipline(s) to be at risk. Clearly, critical engagement with the classical past is called for, but finding ways to advocate the study of that past while at the same time calling attention to politically repulsive elements of it requires a delicate balancing act, for which we have few models, paradoxically because the admiration that antiquity traditionally has enjoyed allowed many classical scholars to avoid developing them. The approach taken by *Pharos*—and I do not say this is the only or even the best approach, it is just the one we have tried out over the past year—is to ask how these hateful versions of antiquity create openings for progressive and inclusive articulations of that past. The arguments we have made on our site, and which I summarise below, owe a tremendous debt to the scholars who have so generously responded to our requests for comment; their responses, in turn, often draw on the published work of generations of scholars who have turned a critical, rather than idealising eye on the classical world.<sup>38</sup> Thus *Pharos*' primary contribution is less in the discovery of new, more critical ways of talking about the ancient world but

in making the explicit connection, on a platform accessible to a broad public, between the critical study of antiquity and hateful appropriations of antiquity that have been, and continue to be, promulgated online.

The arguments of hate groups can, for example, throw into relief the pernicious effects of the traditional idealisation of antiquity and prompt us to consider what those idealised narratives leave out. For example, Jason Reza Jorjani, who collaborated with white supremacist Richard Spencer in founding his website ([altright.com](http://altright.com)),<sup>39</sup> was caught on tape by the Swedish organisation 'Hope not Hate' saying that after the 'expulsion of the majority of migrants, including citizens of Muslim descent' from Europe 'Hitler will be seen...like Alexander [the Great]...as a great European leader'.<sup>40</sup> We may initially bristle at the way this comparison elevates Hitler to Alexander's level of fame and significance, but it also provides an opportunity to reflect on the similarities between Alexander and Hitler: both were leaders who used military violence to further an imperial, expansionist program. Alexander being called 'the Great' is the reflex of the persistent, often implicit, claim that his conquests 'civilized' the Mediterranean world, but it probably did not seem so from the point of view of those he conquered. The very provocation of Jorjani's comparison can serve as a prompt to reconsider these traditional narratives.

Something similar can result from learning that Augustus Sol Invictus includes the Athenian statesman Pericles' 'Funeral Oration' (as reported by Thucydides)<sup>41</sup> in the 'Historic Speeches and Documents' page of his website, *The Revolutionary Conservative*, alongside famous xenophobic speeches like that given in 1968 by the Classical scholar and member of parliament Enoch Powell in which he foretold (quoting Virgil's *Aeneid*) 'rivers of blood' in Britain if immigration continued unchecked.<sup>42</sup> Pericles is usually remembered as one of the greatest orators of Greece, as one of the architects of Classical Athens and as the embodiment of Athens' democratic ideals, primarily because the 'Funeral Oration' provides such a succinct statement of those ideals.<sup>43</sup> But his inclusion on Sol Invictus' site should remind us that Pericles also enacted legislation that greatly restricted access to citizenship in Athens (most likely the reason for the inclusion of his speech on Sol Invictus' xenophobic site) and can furthermore serve as a starting point for a recognition of the disjunction between the ideals expressed in the speech and the reality of Athenian life.<sup>44</sup>

This critical approach can be applied to the hate groups' own idealisations of antiquity, as the example of classical Sparta shows. Sparta has long been a favourite ancient model for nationalist movements, which construct it as the kind of racially pure, strictly hierarchical and militaristic society that we should imitate.<sup>45</sup> For example, among the racist, misogynist and homophobic protesters who gathered in Berkeley, California in April 2017 to protest the university's cancellation of a speech by an icon of the Alt-Right were a man wearing a helmet modelled on ancient Spartan armour and a group flying a flag featuring an image of that same

style of helmet.<sup>46</sup> *Pharos* has documented similar invocations of Sparta by paramilitary militia groups<sup>47</sup> and purveyors of white nationalist apparel,<sup>48</sup> and white supremacists make ancient Sparta the lynchpin of a fabricated white racial continuity between ancient Greeks and modern northern-Europeans.<sup>49</sup> It has long been recognised that such groups' idealisation of Sparta ignores or implicitly endorses that city-state's reliance on slave labour and practice of selective infanticide, not to mention the homoeroticism of its military culture, which is at odds with the politics of many of those who admire that culture.<sup>50</sup> Historians have recently questioned the historicity of some of these practices, attributed in ancient sources to Sparta,<sup>51</sup> but white supremacists who admire Sparta are unlikely to care about historical accuracy, and in any case may regard oligarchic rule and eugenic practices such as infanticide admirable qualities; certainly Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels and the scholars whose research informed their ideology, did.<sup>52</sup> But even without invoking those qualities Sparta should seem an odd model for their movement, because the collapse of Sparta as a military power in the ancient world came as a result of precisely those aspects of its culture that these groups admire, especially the strictness of their requirements for citizenship, which led to a population crisis and the collapse of their military as they had to rely increasingly on mercenaries.<sup>53</sup> A critical approach allows us to argue that the model of Sparta illustrates that a society like that envisioned by these protesters is not something we should try to recreate, but is rather doomed to fail.

This shift of focus from idealisation to recognition of failures finds a parallel in a different kind of response, which takes the hateful appropriation as an opportunity to broaden our view of the ancient world from the monolithic one that hate groups prefer. The article cited earlier arguing that women are inferior to men because Aristotle said so may be laughable for its specious reasoning, but it does not really misrepresent a misogynist dimension to Aristotle's thinking. But this is, nevertheless, only one dimension of his thinking, which also asserts (in the same passage the article seems to be based on) that all human beings, including women, share rationality,<sup>54</sup> and that the friendship that a man and a woman can enjoy is one of the best kinds.<sup>55</sup> More significantly, Aristotle's views on women are at odds with the practices of many other ancient philosophical schools, most of which allowed women to study philosophy alongside the men. The Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus (first century CE) even wrote treatises in which he advocated for women to study philosophy and for boys and girls to receive the same education. Aristotle has been more influential than Musonius Rufus, but this is surely the result of the congruence of his thought with the oppressive or exclusive political paradigms that were dominant throughout the period of his influence, not the result of his inherent superiority to other ancient philosophers like Musonius, who are equally representative of 'ancient thought'. The very narrowness of the misogynists' view of antiquity provides an opportunity to expand that view.<sup>56</sup>

In fact, the example of Aristotle can provide a case-study in the historical persistence of certain forms of bias such as misogyny. Aristotle's works contain many insights into the physical world, including some that were doubted throughout history but then verified in modern times.<sup>57</sup> These can only have come as the result of careful observation. But in the case of women, many of Aristotle's empirical observations can easily be refuted, such as his claim that women have fewer teeth than men. If he had simply counted them he would have known that they ordinarily have the same number.<sup>58</sup> Aristotle seems to have been guilty of something like confirmation bias when studying women: he accepted his society's assumption that women were 'lesser' than men and so abandoned his usual observational method in favour of findings that would uphold those assumptions. The example of Aristotle thus suggests first of all that all investigators, no matter how respected, are susceptible to biases, but also, because in other areas his observations have often stood the test of time, that misogyny may be a more difficult bias than others to overcome.

In this way the study of antiquity can serve itself as a means of exposing the prejudices that hate groups disguise behind lofty-sounding invocations of the classical past. The misogynist website *Return of Kings* (ReturnofKings.com), which the Southern Poverty Law Center began tracking as a hate group under the ideology of 'male supremacy' in 2018,<sup>59</sup> published an article arguing that the longevity of the Roman Empire should be attributed to that culture's admiration for 'manly character', and that the only way to 'renew our civilization' is to emulate this aspect of Roman culture.<sup>60</sup> It is possible to refute many of the assertions about Roman history in this article, which claims, for example, that in ancient Rome 'there was no coddling, and certainly no handouts, both of which are prevalent throughout the West today'; the author is apparently unaware that as early as the second century BCE the Roman state subsidised and even occasionally distributed food for free, or that the poet Juvenal's 'bread and circuses', describing state-sponsored programs to placate the citizenry, is a byword for the kind of 'coddling' that the article decries.<sup>61</sup> One can also point out that having sex with other males was a normal part of masculine experience in ancient Rome, a phenomenon seemingly at odds with *Return of Kings*' editorial warning that 'homosexuals are strongly discouraged from commenting here'.<sup>62</sup> But more can be said beyond pointing out these ignorant misunderstandings.

The narrative of moral decline articulated in the *Return of Kings* article bears a striking similarity to a similar narrative articulated by Roman writers themselves: that previous generations were more manly than the current generation, whose effeminacy is to blame for any number of society's ills.<sup>63</sup> The persistence of this narrative among Roman writers can be explained as a reflex of changing political conditions, in particular the shift from an oligarchic Republic to a monarchy under Augustus and his increasingly autocratic successors. The elites who enjoyed political

power under the Republic found themselves subordinate under the principate, and so turned to such nostalgic narratives as a reaction to their declining fortunes. Augustus himself, in turn, benefited from such narratives of decline because they allowed him to paint his innovative dictatorship as a necessary step in the restoration of traditional Roman virtues. Similarly the writers on *Return of Kings* couch their cultural commentary in the language of 'traditional' virtues and the 'renewal' of 'Western Civilization' but the parallel between their argumentation and that of the Romans themselves underscores their true motivation as men who are frustrated with increasing gender equity in our society and whose reaction to this (still incremental) change is to decry decline and foment nostalgia for a supposedly more virtuous, and actually imaginary, past age. A critical assessment of their invocation of antiquity exposes them as an illustration of an oft-repeated, because fundamental, observation of the social justice movement: 'when you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression'.<sup>64</sup> There are other ways to recognise these misogynists as such, but doing it through the lens of the ancient history they invoke reveals the long history of their tactics, and makes their self-serving and self-deluded nostalgia seem that much more clichéd.

Not all aspects of the classical past lend themselves to this kind of argument, but even those that are deeply implicated in politically unpalatable ideologies can have their use. I referred earlier to the egregious errors in the representation of Hercules on a misogynist site that claimed that the mythological hero provides a model of masculinity. The article included an attack on the transgender rights movement, when it suggested that Hercules would approve of 'conquering new frontiers in colonizing Mars' but not of 'trying to redefine gender'.<sup>65</sup> Hercules is an odd figure to invoke in this connection, because Hercules famously enslaved himself to a woman, Queen Omphale, and is represented in ancient literary and visual sources as wearing her dresses and jewellery while she wore his lion skin and brandished his club, making Hercules a figure in the history of gender fluidity, not the bulwark against it that the article claims him to be. But although this history clearly undermines the article's argument, it does not make Hercules a prototype for the trans rights movement: he enslaved himself to Omphale, in most versions of the myth, as a punishment for past crimes, including murder, and his exchange of roles with Omphale was clearly regarded as both debasing and comical. We cannot claim that ancient culture provides any kind of model for tolerance and understanding of those who exist outside of traditional gender binaries: the dominant political narrative, articulated in the myth, treated any kind of fluidity, even at the level of Hercules' cross-dressing, as deviant. And yet the very fact that this myth was repeated and propagated in antiquity over a very long period of time suggests that the Greco-Roman world recognised gender non-conformity as part of human experience. Even if it was something that world sought to suppress and vilify,<sup>66</sup> this and stories

like it provide part of the answer to transphobic arguments that dismiss the transgender rights movement as a fad, or a sign of a decadent society: the ancient evidence does not help us articulate how our society should treat transgender people, but it suggests that they have always been with us and that granting them their full humanity is long overdue.<sup>67</sup>

Ultimately, neither *Pharos* nor any honest assessment of the classical world will be able to cleanse it of its implication in oppressive political movements. But this does not mean we should cede that past to those who would use it to give legitimacy to hateful politics. Rather, we must strive to articulate vision of the classical world that both adheres to historical facts as understood in the most up-to-date research and promotes a more just and equitable world. In many cases the ancient world lends itself to both interpretations. The Roman Republic defined its political structure with the phrase *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, ‘The Senate and People of Rome’, a phrase which came to be abbreviated by the acronym ‘S.P.Q.R.’. This acronym, which proudly declares a continuity between ancient and modern Rome, is still used in the present-day as a symbol of the city of Rome, whether by the city’s professional football club, A.S. Roma, as a hashtag for tourists sharing their vacation photos on social media and even on the manhole covers of the modern city. Mussolini also made this abbreviation part of his propaganda that painted his fascist regime as a restoration of the Roman Empire, and it continues to be a favourite tattoo and chat-room pseudonym for white nationalists.<sup>68</sup> No amount of historical research can settle what the true politics of the abbreviation S.P.Q.R. were in antiquity, let alone what they should be now: from its conception in ancient Rome it was simultaneously an ideal of shared, collaborative governance between elites and the broader citizenry, and an idealising screen for an oligarchic political reality. As the centuries passed even the words that the four letters stood for became opaque to most who encountered it.<sup>69</sup> In its contested polyvalence, in its simultaneous appropriation by both apolitical lovers of history and promoters of white nationalism, this abbreviation embodies the whole challenge of responding to appropriations of antiquity by hate groups: that past can signify many things we abhor, whether we like it or not. But it need not only signify violence and oppression. If we do not wish to cede the classical past to those who would use it in this way, we must articulate, and make broadly available, a better vision of it.

## Notes

- 1 Donna Zuckerberg, ‘How to be a good classicist under a bad emperor’.
- 2 Donna Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018) provides an in-depth analysis of the misogynist strain of these appropriations.
- 3 A recent treatment of the Romans along these lines is Richard Why We Are All Romans; for the Greeks, Hall, *Introducing the Ancient Greeks* is more circumspect.



- 4 Pharos, 'American Fascist manifesto begins with the Roman Republic'.
- 5 Pharos, 'Inequality in the Confederacy a manifestation of ancient Greece and Rome'.
- 6 Referring without citation to *Politics* 1.1260a, where Aristotle writes that women's souls do not possess 'full authority'.
- 7 Pharos, 'Aristotle enlisted to justify misogyny'.
- 8 On the appropriation of this term by race pseudo-scientists see Saini, *Superior*, 87–108.
- 9 Pharos, 'Juvenal made to support modern homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny'.
- 10 A recent innovative treatment is Harper, *The Fate of Rome*.
- 11 Pharos, 'Xenophobic op-ed in local paper reflects hate site's arguments'.
- 12 Pharos, 'Feminism blamed for fall of Rome'.
- 13 Scheidel, *Escape from Rome*, argues that the fall of the Roman Empire was beneficial for the development of Europe.
- 14 A critical account of this theory of a 'Dorian invasion' can be found in Hall, *Ethnic Identity and Greek Antiquity*, esp. 56–66. For the history of how this narrative of Greek history replaced one that had become politically and racially 'intolerable' in northern Europe, see Bernal, *Black Athena*, 281–316.
- 15 Pharos, 'Site blames decline of Greece on loss of racial purity'.
- 16 Pharos, 'Hercules invoked to oppose gender equality'.
- 17 Pharos, 'White supremacist site claims Nordic invaders gave rise to Classical Greece'.
- 18 Tenny Frank (1916) 'Race Mixture in the Roman Empire' 705. Kennedy, 'White Supremacy and Classics Scholarship' collects examples of Frank's article being cited.
- 19 Martin Winkler, *The Roman Salute*; Pharos' documentation of Schoep's comments is at Pharos, 'Nazi leader re-brands the Nazi salute as Roman salute'.
- 20 Represented most recently by Davidson *The Greeks and Greek Love*.
- 21 Pharos, 'White Nationalists call ancient Greek homosexuality a "myth"'.  
22 An engaging introduction to the misogyny of ancient Greco-Roman culture is Beard, *Women and Power*.
- 23 Pharos, 'Misogynist argues that Rape of the Sabines established "female privilege"' and 'Macrobius said to reveal unspeakable gynocentric reality'. On 'gynocentrism' online more generally see Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men*, chapter 1 and especially 16–7.
- 24 Pharos, 'The white supremacist with a Roman name: Augustus Sol Invictus'.
- 25 Marla Stone, 'A Flexible Rome'.
- 26 Michelle Renee Salzman, 'Aurelian and the Cult of the Unconquered Sun'.
- 27 Martijn Icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus*.
- 28 Mary Beard, 'The Latin Right'.
- 29 Beyond the obvious inequalities inherent in any slave-owning society, one may point to the numerous and carefully policed distinctions of status even within the basic dichotomies of free and slave, citizen and non-citizen. See, for example, Kamen *Status in Classical Athens*.
- 30 Susanna Braund, *Juvenal: Satires*, 234.
- 31 Pharos, 'Plato: white supremacy and totalitarianism'.
- 32 Plato, *Republic* 5.459e and 460c, translated by Tom Griffith. H.D. Rankin, *Plato and the Individual* 45 has a chart summarising Socrates' proposed treatment of children of various types of parents.
- 33 Marc Huys, 'The Spartan Practice of Selective Infanticide' 60n37 summarises the bibliography.
- 34 Rankin, *Plato and the Individual*, 46.
- 35 Harold Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters*.

- 36 Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism*, 124 and ff.; for Nazi eugenics specifically, see Johann Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans* 200–4.
- 37 This reading of Plato is rendered even less efficacious in making Plato politically palatable to a progressive sensibility by its historical association with Leo Strauss, who is himself often regarded as elitist and anti-democratic.
- 38 These contributors, and the scholarship they recommended to us, are cited in our online publications, which are linked throughout this essay.
- 39 For more on Jason Reza Jorjani see chapter 16 of this volume, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Far Right in the Digital Age’.
- 40 Pharos, “‘Great European leader’ Hitler compared to Alexander the Great’.
- 41 Thucydides, 2.35ff.
- 42 Pharos, ‘White supremacist site celebrates Pericles’ Funeral Oration’.
- 43 For example, Murphy et al., *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*, 12–5.
- 44 Pharos, ‘Not just Sparta’ documents an essay arguing that ancient Athens’ “nativist democracy” provides a model for how white supremacist politics can thrive in a democratic society, beginning with an image of an ancient bust of Pericles.
- 45 Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans*.
- 46 Pharos, ‘Spartan helmets at April 2017 Berkeley protests’.
- 47 Pharos, ‘Militia group to provide “Spartan Training”’.
- 48 Pharos, “‘Warrior” apparel invokes antiquity’.
- 49 Pharos, ‘White supremacist site claims Nordic invaders gave rise to Classical Greece’.
- 50 Pharos, ‘Scholars respond to Spartan helmets’.
- 51 Plutarch’s description of selective infanticide in Sparta (*Life of Lycurgus*, 16.1–2) seems likely to be ahistorical; see Huys ‘The Spartan Practice of Selective Infanticide’ and Ducat, *Spartan Education* 28. More controversial is Davidson, *Greeks and Greek Love* on homoeroticism in the Spartan military. No one disputes the historicity of Sparta’s reliance on slave labour.
- 52 Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans*, 221–6.
- 53 Pharos, ‘This is not Sparta’. A recent study of the citizen population of Sparta is Doran, *Spartan Oliganthropia*.
- 54 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1259b3–4.
- 55 Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1162a.
- 56 Pharos, ‘Scholars respond to Aristotle being enlisted in support of misogyny’. For a feminist critique of Musonius Rufus, see Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men*, 71–3.
- 57 G.E.R. Lloyd, *Science, Folklore, and Ideology*, 102.
- 58 Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 2.3 501b20.
- 59 Southern Poverty Law Center, ‘The Year in Hate’.
- 60 Pharos, ‘Neomasculine site argues for the revival of Roman manly character’. ReturnofKings.com stopped publishing new material in October 2018 due to falling advertising revenue, but its articles remain available.
- 61 Juvenal, *Satires*, 10.81.
- 62 Craig A. Williams, *Roman Sexuality*, 31ff.
- 63 One example is Horace, *Odes* 3.6: ‘Worse than our grandparents’ generation, our parents then produced us, even worse, and soon to bear still more sinful children’ (trans. Kline).
- 64 Pharos, ‘Scholars respond to misogynist nostalgia for Roman masculinity’.
- 65 Pharos, ‘Hercules invoked to oppose gender equality’.
- 66 See Sasha Barish, ‘Iphis’ Hair’ on the ways that a contemporary transgender audience might be able to relate to Ovid’s narratives of gender transformation in the *Metamorphoses*, even though those narratives tend to represent the characters and their desires as unnatural.

- 67 Campanile et al. *Transantiquity*, published in 2017, is the first collection of essays on 'transgender dynamics in the ancient world' but see the criticisms of Maisel, 'Women Are Made, But from What?'
- 68 Pharos, 'SPQR and white nationalism'.
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*Figure 14.1* Photos of participants of the Past Continues project, sharing their histories. More information about the ‘Past Continues - Shared Narratives’ initiative is on the project’s website at <https://pastcontinues.org>. Image courtesy authors.

## 14 Past Continues

### The Instrumentalisation of History in the Countries of Former Yugoslavia

*Maja Nenadović and Mario Mažić*

A convicted Bosnian Croat war criminal drinks poison in the international court during his final sentencing for a brutal campaign against Bosniaks, and his death is commemorated as hero's martyrdom across Croatia.<sup>1</sup> A train is painted with 'Kosovo is Serbia' slogans in 21 languages, and this escalates to military threats being issued between Kosovo and Serbia.<sup>2</sup> A Bosnian Serb President bans schools from teaching about the Siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica genocide in roughly half of the country.<sup>3</sup> A movie director makes a documentary film about the most notorious death camp in the Second World War Croatia—Jasenovac—denying the true nature of the camp and the number of Serbs, Jews, Roma and political prisoners who perished in it.<sup>4</sup> These incidents described, all of which took place between 2016 and 2018, offer a glimpse into the reality of life in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia.

In the countries of former Yugoslavia, unprocessed history continues to be the main source of polarisation. These contradictory historical narratives do not only refer to the 1990s and the conflict(s) of breakup of Yugoslavia but also to the Second World War and the never resolved topic of Nazi collaboration or the post-war communist reprisals against domestic collaborators. They constitute an ever-present source of political conflict and antagonism, and a fuel that drives right-wing extremism. However, while most other chapters in this volume explore the ways in which the contemporary far-right, neo-Fascist, Alt-Right, Identitarian and other similar movements have mobilised support around revisionist counter-narratives, this chapter instead tackles the consistent state policies on historical interpretation of past events that have served the national identity-building and nation-building projects, particularly in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Croatian and Serbian post-1990 national identities in particular reject any notions that challenge what are regarded as building blocks or pillars of the new exclusivist national identities. History in these countries is open-ended. The generations that waged wars following the breakup of Yugoslavia waged them with the understanding that they were shaping history—although alive and contemporary, they saw themselves as historical figures (in the making).



Thus, all three components of understanding of time had to be revised and aligned—the past, the present and the future. The toxic presence of historical narratives in the public discourse has gone so far that it was listed in 2018 as one of the primary reasons of young people emigrating from the region.<sup>5</sup>

Living in an environment of pervasive presence of historical narratives can be particularly debilitating for young people whose present, as well as future, seems hijacked and kept hostage by those continuously advocating, promoting and imposing historical narrative-mandated rules and norms onto those young people's thinking, speaking and behaviour. How does one's identity develop within such a context? In what ways do these dominant historical narratives shape young people's attitudes about their peers from neighbouring (formerly warring) countries? What, if anything, can be done to neutralise the harmful effects of history overburdening and suffocating the present? This essay is inspired by the ongoing civic project 'The Past Continues - Shared Narratives?'<sup>6</sup> that was launched in the spring of 2018, gathering 120 young people from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia in joint exploration of the contested histories and their polarising effects. In the process of de/constructing these contradictory historical narratives, the participants interview contemporary witnesses of war, analyse political elites' instrumentalisation of history and attempt to arrive at a single narrative of key contested historical events. It is necessary to note that the project presented in this chapter does not seek to construct, present or promote a 'new history'. The shared narratives developed through 'Past Continues' will not be presented as academic works that claim to be 'the truth'. This initiative is more a social experiment and an advocacy tool for reconciliation. The project is challenging the status quo by showing, in practice, that it is possible for young people of different identities to seek truth together and to tackle the questions of historically charged and contested events. Above all, 'Past Continues - Shared Narratives?' challenges the approach to history education that is ideologised to the extent that it discourages questioning and open inquiry.

The first section of this chapter will outline the legacy of the breakup of Yugoslavia, and identify the way in which the dominant historical narratives continue to serve as political mobilisation tools. Special attention will be given to the educational systems that, next to the media and political elites' speeches and policies, play a crucial role in the perpetuation of these historical narratives for new generations. The next section will explore the assumptions behind the launching of the 'Past Continues - Shared Narratives?' project, the intervention rationale and the method of narrative de/construction that is employed within the course of this non-formal educational program. The third section will focus on the motivations of participants to join the program, as well as

the initial findings from their personal reflections and participant observation instances during the 'Bring Your Own History' project kick-off conference in Belgrade (March 2018), as well as during some of the initial working group exchanges in some of the most contentious sites of memory throughout the countries of former Yugoslavia. Finally, the concluding section reflects on this attempt to face this difficult history through disarming these dominant, contradictory historical narratives and neutralising their harmful effect on the future generations.

## The Identifying Role of Historical Narratives

### *Role of Historical Narratives in State-Building*

Considering that the fundamental values of the Homeland War are unambiguously accepted by the entirety of Croatian people and all citizens of the Republic of Croatia. (...) The Republic of Croatia led a just and legitimate, defensive and liberating, rather than aggressive and invasive war towards anyone in which it defended its territory from the great-Serbian aggression within its internationally recognized borders. (...) The House of Representatives of the Croatian National Parliament invites all citizens, state and social institutions, trade unions, associations and media, and obliges all officials and all state bodies of the Republic of Croatia to protect the fundamental values and dignity of the Homeland War as a pledge of our civilizational future.<sup>7</sup>

These excerpts from the Croatian Parliament's *Declaration on the Homeland War* adopted in 2000 are directly challenged by some of the legal findings of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Most notably, the Appeals Chamber judgement in *Prlić et al.* case established that the Republic of Croatia with its then-political and military leadership and through control over forces of Bosnian Croats implemented a joint criminal enterprise aimed at establishing a Croat-dominated Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosna through ethnic cleansing of Bosniak population. The Croatian executive and legislative political leadership both refused, just as most of the opposition parties, to acknowledge this finding and interpretation and to date failed to alter the disproved interpretations described in the Parliament's *Declaration on the Homeland War*, both by the non-initiation of a formal amendment process and in their public statements. Moreover, one of the convicted war criminals in this case, Slobodan Praljak, committed suicide in the courtroom as the judgement was being proclaimed. Both the President and the Prime Minister of Croatia expressed their condolences, proclaiming it a grave injustice. In the days that followed, a commemoration was organised for Praljak in Zagreb, Croatia's capital,

drawing some 2,000 people to pay their respects, among them government ministers and numerous former political and military leaders. The sentiment of this commemoration was that a Croat hero was pushed into martyrdom by the injustice and an insult of naming him a war criminal.

On 24 March 2018 in Aleksinac, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, who also served as Minister of Information in Slobodan Milošević's wartime government, said:

For 19 years since one of the hardest days for our country, since March 24, 1999, the first in a series of 78 long days of frenzied aggression by the largest military alliance in the history of humanity on a small and proud country in the heart of Europe. For 19 years since the symbol of injustice has been inflicted upon a nation that has experienced a lot of misery and suffering through history, but never imagined that such a fate could befall on it at the end of the 20th century. Nineteen, as they have said today, the great, the largest and the strongest, hit a small country of a proud and unbowed people who were guilty - guilty for existing and guarding and defending their own. That act of soullessness and foolishness, that campaign was called the 'Merciful angel' as if the killing of an innocent people, the demolition of factories, hospitals, monuments, or the destruction of infrastructure could be understood as anything humane, let alone merciful. (...) For the past few years we mark the murder of our people in Varvarin, in Grdelica, in Batajnica and in any other place.<sup>8</sup>

The narrative offered here by President Vučić has an especially cruel element—the mention of Batajnica. Batajnica is a peripheral part of Belgrade, Serbia's capital, located in the Zemun municipality. In 2001, exhumations of human remains of some 700 people began at Batajnica. It was established that these bodies were transported from Kosovo: these are remains of Kosovo Albanians killed by Serbian police and military forces during their criminal campaign in Kosovo and were transported to Batajnica in an attempt to cover up crimes committed against them. These crimes are the very reason behind the NATO intervention. Vučić's speech was a clear effort to keep the narrative of Albanian victims buried even as their remains were being dug up.

Historian Elazar Barkan has argued, 'Because group identity is shaped by historical perspectives, historical narratives have an explicit and direct impact on national identities'.<sup>9</sup> The violent breakup of Yugoslavia obviously left deep consequences that still shape the social, political and economic dynamics in the successor states of former Yugoslavia. In today's environment, war is one of the most talked about topics in the region. The institutional effect of the dissolution of former federal state

coupled with the consequential state-building processes means that the conflicts had a profound impact on the very identity of the new independent states. It is therefore unsurprising that the narratives stemming from the conflicts continue to be present in today's public discourse in the region.

Dejan Jović, a political scientist, summarised eight main factors seen as reasons for Yugoslavia's demise:

economic crisis; so-called ancient ethnic hatred; nationalism; cultural differences among Yugoslavian peoples; changes in international politics; the role of various individuals in creation or destruction of the Yugoslav state; pre-modern character of Yugoslav state, often compared to that of empires, in contrary to a nation state and structural-institutional reasons.<sup>10</sup>

Jović immediately dismisses the reason of the so-called ancient ethnic hatred as implausible, but stresses that all other factors have indeed contributed. He also notes that while many academics and commentators tend to focus on a single reason or a factor, the process of Yugoslavia's dissolution was in fact caused by an interplay of a multitude of factors. In this chapter we will not analyse these reasons. Rather, they are used here merely to show the complexity of the issue and juxtapose it to the dominant narratives that tend to be simplistic, emotional and ideologised.

In the area of former Yugoslavia, there is an additional challenge to the processes of dialogue and dealing with the past—the fact that there are two levels of undigested recent history and both have very different settings in which particular narratives about them were formed. While the conflicts of the 1990s saw narratives built politically and institutionally in now seven different countries, the narratives about the Second World War were formed during the existence of Yugoslavia, in an unfree and undemocratic environment where the Communist Party and its leader were the supreme arbiters of truth. Since Yugoslavia's dissolution, the deconstruction of these institutionally imposed narratives about the Second World War became a sport of sorts, especially for nationalist historical revisionists. Likewise, there is no doubt whatsoever that the historical (revisionist) narratives of the 1940s had a considerable fuelling effect on the conflicts that erupted in the 1990s, as well as on the subsequent process of narrative development.

Education is a particularly relevant field to look into when assessing the extent and models in which the identity of a country is constructed through historical narratives. Snježana Koren noted in 2015 that:

[P]ersistent attempts to remove the causes of tension by eliminating pluralism and prescribing mandatory interpretations are increasingly

problematic, especially when the complex and difficult legacy of the twentieth century is constantly being reduced to one-dimensional narratives and simplified explanations. In this power struggle, the damage for history teaching is constant, even if this radical rhetoric will be toned down after the elections.<sup>11</sup>

Back in 2002, Ivan Čolović showed how the same approach was already used to justify Serbian actions in the 1990s wars:

The victimization narrative also provides the context for the quite broad public approval of Milošević and his policies throughout the 1990s, as Serbian wartime efforts were framed domestically to fit the existing narrative of Serbian destruction by non-Serbs of the former Yugoslavia and the anti-Serb West.<sup>12</sup>

Such use of educational systems—as breeding grounds for new generations of citizens holding exclusive views towards other (adversarial) groups and towards their own national or ethnic history—is particularly dangerous in the light of a founded assumption that societies that experience cyclical violence are less resilient to repeat outbursts of violence. Siniša Malešević provides the following conclusion in that regard. The years of research on violent political conflicts have generated only a few robust and universally agreed findings. One of these is related to the temporal dimension of violence:

Regions that have histories of protracted violent conflict are more likely to succumb to another wave of violence than those that lack such a past. In some respects, this seems obvious as societies with violent pasts may continue to live under social circumstances that generate conflicts: an environment where resources are scarce, the unresolved issues of mutually exclusive territorial claims, the presence of incompatible belief systems, or the continuous presence of geopolitical instability fostering periodic explosions of violence.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Role of Historical Narrative in Group Identity Formation*

The argument of this chapter and one of the theoretical foundations of this project is that because of this connection between narratives and identity, historical dialogue is largely a political and emotional process, not merely a discursive one. The problem with denial is not in the intellectual inability to understand a historical fact. Rather, it is in the ideologised and emotional barrier that prevents acknowledgement of uncomfortable facts on an entirely different level.

There is a formula to it: If one is of X ethnicity or background, then he or she feels and thinks Y (about the current situation and other groups) and acts in line with those feelings and thoughts. A subject's choices are thus limited; they are determined by one's identity. If a person challenges this narrative, they are challenging the cause, giving up on a common interpretation of history and thus giving up on a shared vision of the future. In a way, they give up on their identity, or at least rebel against it which constitutes an act comparable to treason. Unity, togetherness and belonging are reflected not only in a group's identity, creed or background but also in their thoughts, feelings and actions.

Not all of these elements are new to the post-Yugoslav region. Only the content is new. The structure and the technology had already been used to fuel both fascist and communist political movements. It is not the history, but rather its specific rigid interpretation and instrumentalisation that shapes our environment in the present and offers only one vision of the future. This is precisely what makes political movements built on such technology anti-democratic. Fascist, communist and nationalist movements, albeit diverse and conflicting in the content of their interpretations, all rely on paralysing the individual by creating this ideologically charged continuum of past-present-future. Thus, the effects of challenging historical interpretations necessarily influence the vision of the future.

When an individual growing up in such an environment is confronted with an act of historical injustice imposed on another (adversarial) group, the emotion of empathy is not an initial response. It is disbelief. The notion of such a historical event simply does not fit the wider historical interpretation. But it is not just the interpretation of history that is the problem; it is the role it plays in the wider evolution of identities. This interplay is the source of the emotional charge—in order to acknowledge, one must adapt his or her understanding of own's group identity, as well as the identity of those who used to be understood as the historical villains. This is where denial, relativisation or another evasion of fact come into play.

This shows how these movements are not only anti-democratic, but also anti-reconciliatory on two levels. One, it is impossible to reconcile without recognition. Two, it is counter-intuitive to reconcile with someone who is bound to do you harm by their essential identity. They did it before and they shall do it again—it is in their evil nature. This happens because of nationalist narratives' use of what can be referred to as 'exclusive categories'. These categories can be recognised in their offer of an Identitarian basis of values; a certain group is seen and presented as good, as a collective victim of historical injustice and another as bad, a collective villain. Thus, all and any crimes committed by the victimisation or victim-group are justified or at least justifiable by the acknowledged historical injustices. Likewise, any mention of the 'victim-group's'

responsibility for an injustice imposed on another group simply does not fit the narrative; a victim cannot be the perpetrator, nor can a perpetrator be a hero. This means that the categories that are most used in public discourse, the categories of victimhood and heroism, can only be attributed to one's own group.

### **'Past Continues - Shared Narratives': The Why, the What and the How**

The project 'Past Continues - Shared Narratives' was created to tackle the differing, most often conflicting narratives, about the recent past in former Yugoslavia countries. The examples presented in the previous sections are only the tip of the iceberg of historical revisionism, denial and refusal of facing history that young people witness in the media, in their history textbooks, in politicians' speeches and often at home as well. Even though they are witnessed by the post-war generation, by fostering inter-ethnic distrust and animosity these differing narratives play the role and fulfil the purpose of maintaining a profound division among people living in the countries that were involved in the 1990s conflicts. The 'Past Continues - Shared Narratives' project was designed as a direct response to this lack of effective process of dealing with the past, seeking to involve the youth who studied different histories of same events of various bloody episodes of Yugoslavia's breakup.

Altogether 120 young people (mostly university students) from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro were recruited through an open call to take part in the development of shared narratives about the recent violent history. The project was kicked off in Belgrade in March 2018 with a 'Bring Your Own History' conference, where the participants had the chance to interact, learn about the different narratives and interpretations of shared historical events. The historical narratives de/construction method applied during the 'Past Continues' project was one where the Bring Your Own History conference were eased into the topics surrounding Yugoslavia's dissolution, providing an opening for participant-driven topic selection. This is also where they were able to form bilateral groups, and choose which particular contentious and divided narratives they would work on during the year long process. Each bilateral group, consisting of ten students from each country, was to choose several key topics they would focus on during their common journey, and plan their two study visits to locations of interest.<sup>14</sup> Throughout this process, they were to work on mapping the current (divisive and diverging) narratives of the selected key events, and attempt to arrive to a shared narrative together. Even in the cases where shared narratives would turn out to be an impossibility, it was expected of them to map out the reasons

behind this inability to arrive to a unified perspective of these recent historical events.

The 'Past Continues - Shared Narratives' project was grounded in several assumptions: first, that there is interest among young people to delve into these contentious topics, to hear what 'the other side' thinks and says about the events of the 1990s; second, that the post-war generation with which we would work would not only have a keen awareness of the conflicting narratives, but would also be able to withstand the discomfort induced by challenging the dominant narratives that they had been exposed to throughout their lives (since they have the generational distance from events in which they did not take direct part); third, since the approach was fully participant-driven, it was assumed that the most contentious topics would be selected for processing, i.e. those different ethnic groups' 'chosen traumas' of the 1990s; fourth, since the project was designed to be process-oriented rather than results-oriented, it was assumed that much of the impact on its participants would come from the actual (often first instance) interaction with their peers from other countries/ethnic groups, and that the experience of study trips and first-hand research and interviews would put the participants in the driver seat of their own action-research-based experiential contemporary history education (which is a direct challenge to the educational systems in the region where teacher-centric, lecture-dominated instruction and memorisation-rooted examinations are the norm).

The project seeks to expose these young people first to each other (which is exactly why the kick-off conference was called 'Bring Your Own History'), to sites of atrocities and the people left behind, to practitioners working in the field and various sources. They are encouraged to engage with all the sources they consider to be relevant, and to prove or disprove their worth through inquiry and discussion. Given the considerable body of evidence on crimes collected by the ICTY and local courts, the participants are encouraged to use them to assist in their analysis. However, participants are also encouraged to view the court judgements not as sources for 'final truth' on an entire narrative, but rather for what they are—a definitive account of an individual's guilt or innocence, offering relevant and confirmed insights into a wider historical context. On that note, Professor Anthropology and Law, Richard Ashby Wilson, offered the following analysis:

Law's epistemology is positivist and realist and it requires falsifiable and verifiable evidence, and typically relies upon a scientific, forensic approach to evidence. History, on the other hand, is more pluralistic, open, and interpretative in both its methods and conclusions. Courts ultimately must embrace one entire account to the exclusion of all others, whereas historians often accept aspects of



competing accounts. Historians live more comfortably with difference of opinion, and they often recognize that their evidence and conclusions are not always falsifiable or verifiable. Law is concerned with context only insofar as it impinges on the guilt or innocence of one individual.<sup>15</sup>

Even though the project is ongoing at the time of writing of this chapter, some initial observations can already be made on the basis of the Bring Your Own History kick-off conference and the seven research trip visits that have already taken place. The next section offers a glimpse into the thus far 'Past Continues' process, young people's motivations for participating and some reflections on their experiences.

### **Past Continues—In Medias Res Report<sup>16</sup>**

In their motivation statements that were a constituent part of their applications to the project, participants expressed a variety of reasons that inspired them to join. Some pointed out the continued presence of war 25 years later in their lives ('I come from a region affected by war, an area where war continues to be a part of one's identity'); some cited personal connection to the topic through their fathers who are veterans of the 1990s conflicts ('Even though my father suffered horrors during the war, he believes that changes are possible and that love that once existed in this region is once again possible. When I asked him to tell me about his wartime experiences, he replied, 'It doesn't matter what I've gone through, but what I learned from it. I went to war because I felt it was my duty. Today, I feel it is my duty to do everything in my power that something like that never happens again'); some pointed out to the multi-perspectivity of history and their desire to explore it ('The most important takeaway is that history is subject to interpretation, and that there are always two sides to the same story'); others focused on their generation and the need for them to get involved and educated about these topics ('The possibility to create a shared narrative is a starting point for young people who want to learn more about the war in the environment enveloped in conspiracy of silence. Today, we have the twisted situation that those who speak of war criminals as war criminals are getting discredited and attacked, while those who speak of them as heroes are proclaimed as trustworthy to teach history to the new generations. This way, tensions are generated among youth in the region, so I want to improve and advance my knowledge about these topics together with 100 young people, to create an atmosphere where things will be called by their real name without the fear of being labelled. I don't want our generation to be a lost generation, and for future generations to deal with issues and problems that we ourselves can resolve').

Finally, some explicitly focused on facing history as being a clear prerequisite and condition for the future as being their primary motivator for applying to take part in the project ('We cannot expect a smooth and pleasant journey until we fix the potholes on our roads that have been there several decades. I think that life in the Balkans can be fixed by fixing those holes - by bringing young people together to examine the past, to together recognize the senselessness of war, without blaming any sides, only the elites. Young people in the region shouldn't be divided by the past, but connected by it - to learn about it, in order to prevent these events from ever happening again').

At the Bring Your Own History kick-off conference in Belgrade, it was apparent that while a general sense of goodwill, interest and curiosity existed among all participants, the group was by no means uniform in their attitudes and beliefs and in some cases held very starkly opposing views on interpretations of (common/same) history. During the very first ice-breaking getting-to-know-each-other session, some participants openly admitted that they had applied to take part in the project against their parents' will—so some were in Belgrade also without their parents knowing about it. (All participants were of age, so no minors were involved whose participation would have required parental consent.) Humour was one of the coping mechanisms for some individuals for dealing with the difficult or controversial topics, while others chose to observe and listen and soak in impressions. For several participants, motivation to attend was deeply personal, as they had lost family members in the war and they continued to struggle with the continued legacy of conflict in their lives and the other side's denial of wrongdoing. Participants were asked to reflect on some defining moments in their lives when it came to forming an attitude about the 1990s history, and they contributed stories and messages into a 'virtual group diary' contribution box. For example, one such entry was:

In Rijeka, for the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Operation Storm, the Croatian National Theater organized a public discussion during which 5 women of different nationalities told their wartime stories. Members of right-wing nationalist circles didn't like that, because 'how could anyone question our one and only truth (about the Homeland war)?!' The participants of this public discussion were later subjected to verbal attacks, even attempted physical attack. On that day...I felt a certain dose of fear while walking on the street of my own country.

Being half-way through the project's implementation, we were pleasantly surprised to see some of our initial assumptions challenged and, in some cases, proven wrong. Namely we expected the participants would exclusively focus on the most controversial, and by definition most

traumatic and painful, episodes of the 1990s conflict. However, several groups chose to include in their research focus the topic of anti-war protests that got drowned in the dominant narratives and disappeared from public consciousness. These forgotten attempts to fight nationalism, division and war will now be revived through participants' focus on them—and this is a positive participant-driven contribution of the project, remembrance of historical events that strove to connect, rather than divide. These anti-war protests challenge the dominant narratives of uniform desire for conflict (or, in most cases interpreted as self-defence or liberation war) and they constitute a positive counterbalance to the other topics studied by the bilateral groups, most of which are narratively divided and painful. Finally, another element of expectations being exceeded (or assumptions being understated) is the positive reflection of participants illustrated in the comments such as, 'I am glad to come to see and hear the other side', and 'I think all the young people from Serbia should come and see this museum (in Vukovar)'. For many of the participants, the Belgrade kick-off conference was the first ever visit to a neighbouring country, or an encounter with peers from the 'opposing' side.

In order to deconstruct/dissolve an ideologised emotional barrier that is imposed on young people growing up in post-war countries of former Yugoslavia, a safe space for exploration, critique, confirmation, contradiction and non-judgement of historical narratives needed to be created, no matter how hard or shocking it may have been to confront some of them initially. Only in this type of open inquiry could the emotional barrier be overcome to generate the freedom of letting go of previously (strongly) held views and creating space in one's mind and heart for allowing for an alternative interpretation of history, even if it meant adopting one that is not shared by one's own circle of classmates, friends, family.

## **Past Discontinued**

The 'Past Continues' project, even though it is dealing with narratives about specific events, is not in fact directed at narratives. It is directed at deconstructing the very technology that manipulates narratives for a political purpose that is both anti-democratic and anti-reconciliatory. This technology is simple: students and young people in general are not welcome or incentivised to question historical narratives. They are, instead, encouraged to learn and repeat, to passively 'inherit' these narratives. Of course, this is so clearly because these narratives are oftentimes hard to defend. They are not built upon intellectual inquiry into the facts and processes of our recent past. Rather, they are ideology-filled stories and thus uniquely and highly specific.

Throughout the project, we sought to create a context in which participants can emancipate themselves from being manipulated or instrumentalised by the ruling political elites. It is impossible to neutralise the harmful effect of (divisive) historical narratives without dealing with the present and the way these narratives are instrumentalised to polarise and fuel today's conflict and agenda of the elites maintaining them. For example, the open opposition of Croatian political leadership to the ICTY judgement in *Prlić et al.* that found President Tudman led a *joint criminal enterprise* in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the same opposition of Serbian leadership to the cases involving genocide in Srebrenica is not just signs of a struggle for their view of what happened in the 1990s. It is a struggle about what history textbooks will teach the coming generations. Having open intellectual debates over historically contested issues in classrooms will not only lead more young people closer towards the truth. It will also make them think critically and question these nationalist myths.

Through the participant-led process and action research in which multiple sources and data collection methodologies were applied (primary documents research, speeches and discourse analysis, media archives, contemporary witness interviews), 'Past Continues' attempts to strengthen the resilience of critical thinking in the face of overwhelming emotions stemming from inherited trauma, collective post-traumatic stress syndrome, intergenerational transference or the current instrumentalisation of history for political elites' pursuit of gains in the present.

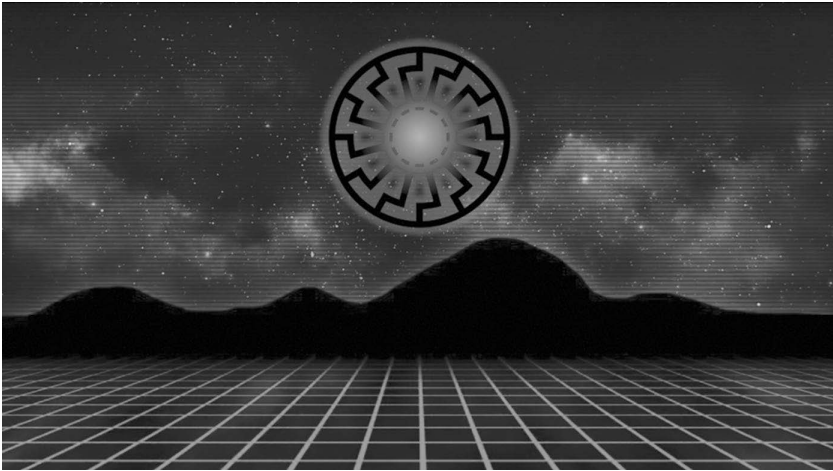
History cannot be tidied up in neatly organised drawers and compartments and accepting its messiness, discomfort and incidences of own group's blame and other group's experiences of victimhood helps dilute the dominant, exclusivist, absolute narratives of victim/hero versus perpetrator. By trying to remove the connection between identity and the emotional charge that comes with loaded historical narratives, our goal is to pave the way from the current 'Past Continues' status quo in the countries of former Yugoslavia to a one where this adversarial past is once and for all—discontinued.

## Notes

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- 2 Delauney, Guy. 'Train row almost pulls Kosovo and Serbia off the rails'. *BBC News*, 18 January 2017. Archived 22 February 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190223182922/https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38666279>.

- 3 Sito-Sucic, Daria. 'Serb president bans teaching about Sarajevo siege, Srebrenica genocide'. *Reuters*, 6 June 2017. Archived 22 February 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190223183054/https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-serbs-history/serb-president-bans-teaching-about-sarajevo-siege-srebrenica-genocide-idUSKBN18X1SL>.
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- 5 Pavić, Bojana Mrvoš. 'Istraživanje: Mladi ne odlaze samo zbog novca, nego i zbog loše politike i sve veće netolerancije u društvu'. [Research: Young people are leaving not only because of the economy, but because of bad politics and growing intolerance in society] *Novi list*, 6 June 2018. Archived 22 February 2019. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190223183843/http://novilist.hr/novilist\\_public/Vijesti/Hrvatska/ISTRAZIVANJE-Mladi-ne-odlaze-samo-zbog-novca-nego-i-zbog-lose-politike-i-sve-vece-netolerancije-u-drustvu?articlesrclink=related](https://web.archive.org/web/20190223183843/http://novilist.hr/novilist_public/Vijesti/Hrvatska/ISTRAZIVANJE-Mladi-ne-odlaze-samo-zbog-novca-nego-i-zbog-lose-politike-i-sve-vece-netolerancije-u-drustvu?articlesrclink=related).
- 6 This project was developed through the fellowship program 'Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability' of the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University in New York, United States, and is implemented by the Regional Network of Youth Initiative for Human Rights in collaboration with PAX for Peace from the Netherlands with support by the Robert Bosch Foundation from Germany and the European Commission.
- 7 Narodne novine (Croatian official gazette). 'Deklaracija o Domovinskom ratu', 17 October 2000. Archived 22 February 2019. [https://web.archive.org/web/20190223184107/https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2000\\_10\\_102\\_1987.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20190223184107/https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2000_10_102_1987.html).
- 8 Aleksandar Vučić's remarks at the 2018 anniversary of NATO bombing of Serbia in March 2018. *Tanjug* 22 February 2019.
- 9 Barkan, Elazar. 'Truth and Reconciliation in History, Introduction: Historians and Historical Reconciliation'. *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (2009): 900.
- 10 Dejan, Jović. 'Razlozi za raspad socijalističke Jugoslavije: kritička analiza postojećih interpretacija'. *Reč* 62, no. 8 (2001): 92.
- 11 Koren, Snježana. 'Twentieth-century Wars in History Teaching and Public Memory of Present-Day Croatia'. *Studi sulla formazione* 2 (2015): 32.
- 12 Čolović, Ivan. *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia: Essays in Political Anthropology*. London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2002: 310.
- 13 Malešević, Siniša. 'Ethnic Conflict and War Crimes in the Balkans: The Narratives of Denial in Post-Conflict Serbia'. *Nationalities Papers* 44 no. 1 (2016): 185.
- 14 The bilateral groups that were formed in Belgrade were as follows: 'Susjedi/Komšije/Neighbours' (Bosnia-Herzegovina/Croatia); 'Boro & Ramiz' (Kosovo/Serbia); 'Tesla' (Croatia/Serbia); 'Drina' (Bosnia-Herzegovina/Serbia); 'Loza i Čevapi' (Bosnia-Herzegovina/Montenegro); 'Mediteran' (Croatia/Montenegro). The group names are all rather symbolic and chosen by the group members themselves.
- 15 Wilson, Richard Ashby. 'Judging History: The Historical Record of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia'. *Human Rights Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2005): 908–42, 912.

- 16 The project officially started in December 2017, with the Call for Participants. In late January, 120 participants were selected, and they took part in the Bring Your Own History kick-off conference in March. In the following months, all bilateral groups conducted two study visits during which they interviewed contemporary witnesses, veteran and victim groups, visited sites of memory and mapped out the current conflicting narratives. At the time of the writing of this chapter, the project was half-way done, with all the current narratives mapped out, and 75% of bilateral group study visits conducted. The scheduled finalisation of the project is the publication of the shared narratives book anticipated in April 2020.



*Figure 15.1* 'Fashwave' meme featuring a Black Sun. Image created by anonymous.

# 15 Esoteric Fascism Online

## 4chan and the Kali Yuga

*Marc Tuters and the Open Intelligence Lab*

Since the early 2010s, fringe web culture has brought a number of peculiar far-right intellectual traditions into the ‘mainstream’ web. Whilst Jordan Peterson and other ‘modern philosophers’ of internet culture are considered gateways into the so-called ‘alt-right’ style that has taken over a number of social media platforms, some of the trending ideas in these discussions may be understood as having a more subcultural derivation which, upon closer inspection, also appear to draw on Western esotericism and other obscure traditions in the history of political thought. Having come to international attention during the period of the 2016 United States presidential election, as a movement, the alt-right have been said to draw their creative energies from underground ‘meme culture’, in which expressions of political belief are veiled in layers of irony and transgression.<sup>1</sup> As our previous research has demonstrated, during this period of time there appeared to be a relationship of influence moving from the ‘fringe’ to the ‘mainstream’—whereby far-right imagery that had originated in political discussion forums on websites like 4chan would regularly show up in people’s social media feeds.<sup>2</sup>

In relation to the allegation that ‘the real creative energy behind the new right-wing sensibility online today springs from anonymous chan culture’, there have been countless journalist exposés and academic studies on apparent mainstreaming of far-right style.<sup>3</sup> In dialogue with this literature, this chapter takes a somewhat different approach, in that it proposes to reconsider how it is that ‘anonymous chan culture’ engages in alternative readings of the historical past, or what the introduction of this volume describes as ‘alt-history’.<sup>4</sup> The argument here is that anonymous chan culture can be understood as giving a contemporary ‘vernacular’ form to a long tradition of post-war far-right political thought. As elaborated upon by a number of historians of the far-right as well as of esotericism,<sup>5</sup> this tradition involves a combination of anti-modernism, aristocratic elitism and Aryan esotericism with a peculiar cocktail of what historian Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke refers to as ‘esoteric fascism’. There is nothing especially new about this phenomenon. As Goodrick-Clarke notes in his study of the neo-Nazi new religious movements that emerged in the United States and Europe in the aftermath of the sixties counterculture, a preoccupation with occult symbology and apocalypticism as well as



anti-Semitic demonology and hatred of the ‘dark races’ are all symptomatic of a far-right underground aesthetic that has been thriving in underground print zine culture for decades. What has changed is the medium for the circulation of these ideas. Whilst in the past the reach of these subcultures was relatively limited, through the medium of internet memes these ideas potentially acquire a much broader reach.<sup>6</sup>

On the ‘politically incorrect’ online discussion boards of 4chan and the now defunct 8chan (both of which have been associated with acts of extreme violence in recent years), one regularly encounters political discussions that are framed in terms of dark imaginings of the past. In keeping with the often conspiratorial nature of discussion on these sites, these histories tend to be distinctly esoteric, both in the general sense that they offer to reveal ‘secret’ or stigmatised knowledge to initiates and more specifically in terms of the concepts and aesthetics with which they are framed.<sup>7</sup> On these chan boards, as well as on other social media platforms, occult symbols such as the Black Sun, which had been in use amongst Aryan and Satanist subcultures for decades, are combined with contemporary subcultural web aesthetics of ‘vaporwave’ images (nostalgic for an imagined cyberpunk past future), in order to create a new genre of so-called ‘fashwave’ memes (see Figure 15.1). As the outward manifestations of a renaissance of esoteric fascism online, ‘fashwave’ may arguably be understood as a successful instance of far-right ‘metapolitics’ (a Gramscianism strategy which has been much discussed over the course of many decades by intellectuals associated with the European New Right that proposes a strategy of not only being political, or affected by politics, but steering political language to reflect a particular ideology). The vernacular shorthand for having subscribed to this far-right project of metapolitics is called ‘taking the red pill’, a term popularised within the alt-right which refers an esoteric experience of awakening from the induced somnambulism of liberal mainstream society—a conspiratorial notion of awakening is also distinctly *liminal* feature of the late countercultural spiritual underground that one scholar of this milieu has referred to as ‘high weirdness’.<sup>8</sup>

A well-known pop-cultural reference to the film *The Matrix* (1999) in many parts of the web, taking the red pill has become contemporary shorthand for a kind of right-wing ideological critique (Lovink and Tuters 2018). If left-wing ideology critique offers its subject ‘to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life’ (Marx and Engels 1848), then the red pill similarly presents its subject with unpleasant truths which those sleepwalking through disregard. It follows that being confronted by this shockingly brutal alternative reality implies locating oneself in a different historical timeline and alt-history. As this chapter will explore, through the eyes of much of radical right political culture on 8- and 4chan/pol/, this involves the esoteric rediscovery of the supremacy of European culture (which often equates with ‘white’ culture) that has been usurped by

a cabal of enemies working in consort to bring about its demise. In what follows we observe how the anonymous denizens of these niche web fora (so-called ‘anons’) interpret this awakening as a radical *call to arms*. It is here, in anons’ engagement with the ideas of esoteric fascism, that we also find a degree of continuity between anonymous chan culture and those neo-Nazi new religious movements that preceded them. The objective of this chapter is thus to scrutinise how it is that anonymous chan culture engage with *the alt-histories of esoteric fascism*. To this end, the chapter begins with a brief description of the ideas of the mid-century Italian esotericist ‘Baron’ Julius Evola (arguably the single most significant intellectual influence on esoteric fascism), before moving on to discuss anon’s vernacular interpretation of these ideas. In order to assess the ‘real world’ danger posed by these alt-histories, the chapter concludes with a brief analysis of the particularly disturbing case of the Christchurch mass shooter whose manifesto was replete with references to anonymous chan culture and whom appears to have imagined himself as a holy warrior engaged fighting against ‘the great replacement’ of Western culture by alien outsiders—a notion which connects extreme-right terrorists with the discourse of new-right populist politicians and intellectuals.<sup>9</sup>

## Evola and Esoteric Fascism

In the current right-wing populist political climate, we can find expressions of the alt-histories of esoteric fascism resonating between the margins and the mainstream, as prominently seen in references to Evola by former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon.<sup>10</sup> An arguable case in point involves the leader of the Forum voor Democratie party, Thierry Baudet, who delivered a controversial speech, whereupon he described Dutch citizens as standing ‘amid the debris of what was once the most beautiful, the greatest civilization the world has ever known’<sup>11</sup> and one that ‘just like those other countries of [the] *boreal* world, [...] are being destroyed by the people who should protect us’.<sup>12</sup> Baudet was questioned by Dutch television host Robert Jensen for using the term ‘boreal’ and responded by claiming that he was being ‘poetic’.<sup>13</sup> If we take Baudet at his word, how are we to interpret his poetry? The most charitable interpretation would be that Baudet used this term to frame a clash of civilisations narrative in poetic terms. In this charitable interpretation, ‘boreal’ is a code-word, or dog-whistle, for ‘northern-European’, or simply *Aryan*. Consistent with this interpretation, it has been argued that Baudet was in fact flirting with the alt-right narrative of ‘white genocide’ or ‘replacement’, which finds liberal multiculturalism guilty of destroying the patrimony European heritage.<sup>14</sup> In fact, *boreal* is actually a term from forestry with no prior history of use in political communications—apart from having once been used once by Marine Le Pen to speak of his desire for a ‘white world’.<sup>15</sup>

An etymologically similar term which refers to Northern European countries as the birthplace of the Aryan race, *hyperborean*, can however be found in esoteric fascist literature.<sup>16</sup> An apt term for what Baudet's use of the term boreal might be *twilight language*, a Sanskrit concept for a style of esoteric communication incomprehensible to outsiders, which is intended to ensure that the uninitiated do not easily gain access to secret knowledge. Whatever his intent, Baudet, who holds a PhD in law, and has a track record of exchanging ideas with far-right thinkers, intended to express the desire to evoke a sense of apocalyptic foreboding whilst calling for the renewal of the social bonds of an organic community in which everyone has their correct place in the broader scheme of things. In this regard, Baudet's message of apocalyptic foreboding and renewal may be seen as in line with the so-called metapoliticisation of fascist discourse, which has taken place in the post-war period, largely through its reformulation via intellectuals of the European New Right.<sup>17</sup> Seemingly in line with this neo-reactionary discourse, Baudet himself once allegedly admitted that conservatism—the school of thought he chose to associate his party to—was the tradition of the 'losers of history' (Kleinpaste 2019). Venerating the likes of Julius Evola, Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt, Oswald Spengler and Martin Heidegger, amongst others, intellectuals of the European New Right have come to reformulate the Manichaeic enemy of fascist ideology in terms of a genocidal 'mondialisme' set to destroy the indigenous character of European culture through the tool of mass migration. As Roger Griffin notes, many on the European New Right have drawn a theory of history from Julius Evola choosing to view themselves as dwelling in the apocalyptic Kali Yuga on the threshold of a new golden age of history. As Nicholas Goodrick-Clark notes, in the post-war period, Evola's ideas became a sophisticated alternative to crude Anglo-American neo-Nazism in which Nazi creed became reformulated as white supremacist ideology.

Evola's theory of history worked well for this purpose, as it required elite males to channel the masses towards the creative destruction of the dominant decadent political system of liberalism. For Evola, those *in the know* had to cultivate themselves to 'promote the aims of race' so long as it were undertaken 'in the presupposition of a right spiritual attitude' meaning that it brings about 'racial values in the consciousness of a people'.<sup>18</sup> Evola's idea was that of the 'kshatriya' described by Krishna in the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita*: a kind of righteous religious warrior with an aristocratic attitude who fights to defend the higher principles of his community and his existence (his dharma). Whilst he felt that few genuine kshatriya were to be found in the kali, he valorised 'the "ordeal by fire" of the primordial forces of race heroic experience, above all other experience... [as] a means to an essentially spiritual and interior end'.<sup>19</sup> He thus considered the 'awakening through heroic experience' as a path to enlightenment: 'this mostly naturalistic experience is purified,

dignified, becomes luminous, until it reaches its highest form, which corresponds to the Aryan conception of war as “holy war”.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning his career as an aristocratic avant-gardist affiliated with the Italian Futurist movement, Evola soon turned his attention towards philosophy and occultism, producing a body of work that sought to embrace traditionalism and thereby reject modernity, egalitarianism, democracy and liberalism. Evola’s esoteric theory of ‘racial values’ came to influence Mussolini’s regime, with which he was briefly affiliated. As Goodrick-Clark notes, Evola’s aura as fascist sage was however untainted by Mussolini’s fall, and indeed he went on to have a prominent influence on the far-right in post-war Italy as an ‘oracle of violence and revolution’,<sup>21</sup> being charged with plotting to re-establish fascism in the early 1950s and eventually came to be considered as the far-right’s answer to a Herbert Marcuse-like figure for his influence on right-wing terrorism in the late 1970s, including the notorious 1980 Bologna railway station bombing.<sup>22</sup> In spite of his influence, in his later years Evola in fact turned away from political activism arguing that an apolitical stance, what he called ‘apoliteia’, was the only appropriate attitude for the traditionalist in the Kali Yuga. In Evola’s estimation, Mussolini and Hitler had failed because they had been too nationalistic and ultimately too modern. Already before the war, Evola rejected Christianity as proper basis for fascism in favour of paganism, cultivating his idealised past in the pre-Christian Roman Ghibelline culture. Whilst paganistic and anti-Christian themes had had a certain influence on mid-century fascism (notably in the Thule society which partly fed into the Nazi movement as well as to a certain extent on members of the Schutzstaffel, or SS) neither Mussolini nor Hitler had much real sympathy for esotericism. Rather, as Goodrick-Clark notes, this whole narrative of esoteric fascism was a distinctly post-war creation pieced together in part out of Evola’s ideas, which proposes an alternate to mid-century fascism, which contemporary far-right actors have used to infuse a once moribund ideology with an aura of seemingly deep spiritual significance.

Evola drew his theory of history from Hindu cycle of the ages in which the Kali Yuga represents the fourth dark age of decline. One of the reasons that he turned towards Hinduism was for what he considered to be its strict hierarchical idealism which he saw as fundamentally opposed to the materialism of the modern West. To this end Evola placed great import in the traditional Hindu caste system as the basis of his race theory, which he tried to distinguish from the modern ‘biological conception of race’—the latter which he identified with the Nazis. Rather, Evola was in favour of what he called an esoteric ‘racism of the second and of the third degree’ in which race exists

not only in the body, but also in the soul and in the spirit as a deep, meta-biological force which conditions both the physical and the psychical structures in the organic totality of the human entity – it

is only if this eminently traditional point of view is assumed – that the mystery of the decline of races can be fathomed in all its aspects.  
(Race and War)

Evola's overarching reactionary theory of history sought to restore the primal truth and order at the cores of what he saw as traditional Western civilisation, the loss of which constituted a crisis for the West. Variations on Evola's notion of a race as spiritual-biological community have come to play a significant role amongst certain variants of neo-Nazi ideology, notably in writings of Francis Parker Yockey as well as in the Aryan and Satanist movements in the United States in 1970s. In particular, the Aryan movement sought to project this religious Manichaeism onto what was seen as biological difference, thereby interpreting human groups as 'absolute categories of good and evil, light and darkness', constructing for themselves what Goodrick-Clark memorably refers to as a 'spiritual basement of a primitive dualism, where pseudo-salvation depends on the elimination of the Other'.<sup>23</sup>

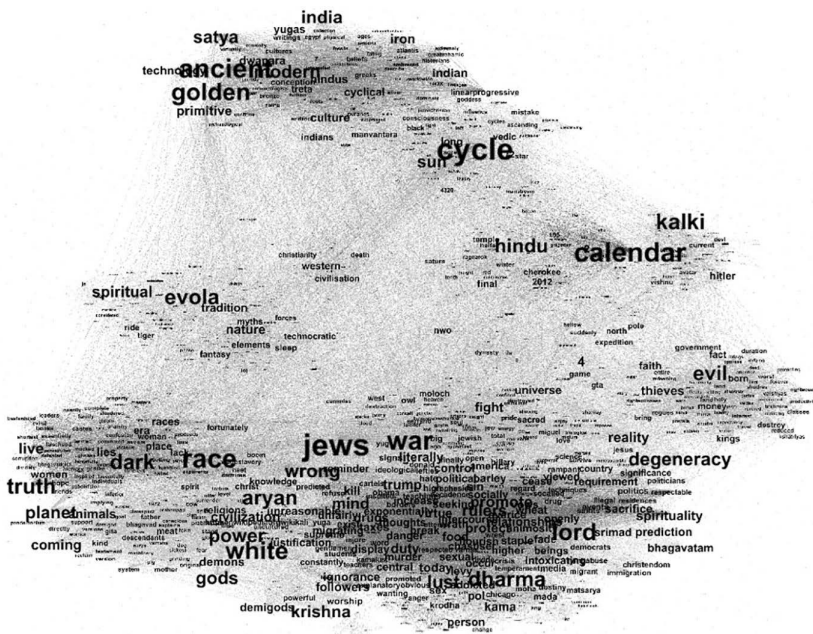
Evola developed an extremely arcane view of Western history as one long narrative of decline. In order to develop the idea of an Aryan *Absolute Individual*,<sup>24</sup> his traditionalist declension narrative required an Eden from which to fall, which he referred to as *Hyperborea*. In this regard Evola's ideas resonated with the notion of an ancient Aryans polar homeland—an esoteric idea that had been popular within the pre-Nazi *völkisch*—in particular amongst members of the Thule society, whose membership list including prominent future Nazis such as Rudolf Hess and Alfred Rosenberg.<sup>25</sup> In order then to restore the Aryan Absolute Individual required an undoing of the processes of devolution of the Ur-species, the latter which Evola imagined in gendered terms as a process of effeminisation. Repackaged in a new cultic guise that borrowed heavily from Evola, what emerged in the post-war era was the concept of the Nazi occult which included neo-Gnostic orientalism, secret Tibetan doctrine and other demonic inspiration. This new 'neo-Nazi' movement viewed Hitler as a kind of Gnostic avatar in their struggle against the forces that also bedevilled Evola (modernity, liberalism and above all 'the Jew'). Following Evola's preoccupation with Hinduism, Miguel Serrano's rather arcane concept of 'Esoteric Hitlerism' for instance blends Gnostic-Manichaeism with kundalini yoga, a kind of contemporary variant on the fourth-century cult of tantra which sought to cultivate magical powers in its adepts through a variety of spiritually dangerous practices intended to raise one's consciousness to supreme levels of unity.<sup>26</sup>

The anti-modern 'völkisch' defence of German identity against the forces of liberalism is generally seen as a precursor to Nazism. To this end, Goodrick-Clark sees certain parallels between the anxiety that gripped parts of Germanic Europe at the turn of the last century, which

fed into the growth of the first wave of Aryanian occult philosophy, and the contemporary period. Furthermore, he points out that today's white-pride movements should be understood as the 'only most radical response' to globalisation in which 'white' European races population have declined by 20% in the past century. As Evola is experiencing yet another renaissance, his contemporary readers in the alt-right see his ideas as offering 'an alternative to the seemingly unstoppable, global speech of democratic capitalism'.<sup>27</sup>

# Holy White War

On 4chan/pol/ esoteric ‘Evolite’ uses of concepts such as ‘Hyperborean’ and ‘Kali Yuga’ have become deeply entwined in the broader apocalyptic discussions concerning the crisis of the Borean ‘white world’, as evoked by right-wing populist. The outcome of a collective research project conducted over the course of two weeks in the summer of 2019, Figure 15.2 below, represents words and concepts that frequently occur alongside



*Figure 15.2* Word collocations with the term ‘Kali Yuga’ in all the comments mentioning ‘Kali Yuga’ on 4chan /pol/ from 2013 to 2019. The image was produced by Ivan Kisjes, using research by Daniel Jurg, Jack Wilson, Emillie de Keulenaar, Giulia Giorgi, Marc Tuters, Ivan Kisjes and Louie Dean Valencia-García; the size is based on frequency as visualised within Gephi, developed by Bastian et al. (2009).

Kali Yuga from a database of over 7,000 posts on 4chan/pol/ dating from 2013 to 2019. In this graph the word ‘evola’ appears to form the core of a noteworthy cluster of terms alongside words such as ‘jews’, ‘whites’, ‘race’ and so on. Upon closer inspection one notices a larger cluster in the bottom of the graph which signifies a group of words (activities) associated with the degeneracy that occurs during the Kali Yuga. Adjacent, on the left, is a cluster of ethno-nationalist associations. This cluster of words can be understood to represent the idea that, for the anonymous Evolites in discussion on /pol/, *the Kali Yuga does not signify a decline for all humanity*, but rather a failure of ‘The West’ to preserve its own roots and identitarian history.<sup>28</sup> Through this interpretation, which appears generally consistent with Evola’s political theories as discussed earlier, discussion of *the Kali Yuga is also a call to arms*. A final relevant cluster is that of the ‘Kalki’ (right-centre), another Hindu term which refers to the avatar of the holy war at the end of the current cycle of history, who brings the Kali Yuga to a close thereby ushering in the new era of historical renewal. From the perspective of Evolite esoteric fascism, this would represent the return of the white world to its former status of hegemonic supremacy.

Extracting all images in the comments mentioning the term ‘Kali Yuga’, as seen in Figure 15.3 below, offers some insight into anonymous chan culture’s vernacular interpretation of this arcane tradition of alt-historiography. In addition to Hindu imagery one finds a cartoon image of an orientalised Adolf Hitler. In reading the posts associated with these images one finds both Hitler and the US President Donald



Figure 15.3 Image wall of the 50 most frequently appearing images in comments mentioning ‘Kalki’, i.e. the saviour that will bring an end to the Kali Yuga on 4chan /pol/ from 2013 to 2019. Image produced by Marc Tuters using Peeters, Stijn and Sal Hagen, ‘4CAT: Capture and Analysis Toolkit’ Computer software. Vers. 1.0 (2018).

Trump frequently mentioned as ‘the Kalki’, with the period of the Third Reich often times discussed as an intentional attempt to ‘end’ the Kali Yuga and re-establish the ethnostate.<sup>29</sup> The association with the Third Reich is furthermore entrenched with the use of the ‘Black Sun’ symbol, an iconographic image of a wheel with 12 zigzag spokes.<sup>30</sup> Finally, one of the more frequent images is a vernacular interpretation of a traditional Hindu depiction of Kalki with the head of Pepe the Frog meme, the latter which has come to be seen as the avatar of anonymous chan culture widely considered to be an ‘ironic’ symbol of alt-right white supremacy.<sup>31</sup> This image of Kalki Pepe encapsulates the relatively unique ‘ironical’ tone through which anonymous chan culture launders esoteric fascism for a new audience.

### The Christchurch Killer and Alt-History

In recent years, then, the anonymous chan boards have become bastions of a newly ironic form of white supremacist ideology—though it should be noted that they have not always been this way.<sup>32</sup> Recent research has, for example, documented the prevalence of explicit neo-Nazi propaganda on 4chan/pol/.<sup>33</sup> Whilst the political discussion of anonymous chan culture can also be understood in relation to a subcultural history of trolling whose aim is to upset and offend those who make the cardinal error or taking themselves too seriously,<sup>34</sup> in the years since the rise of the alt-right, this culture has been increasingly associated with mass shootings in which perpetrators post their ‘manifestos’ to these boards. Whilst ‘de-platforming’ appears to be a solution—indeed 8chan’s web hosting was for example terminated in the aftermath of a mass shooter having posted his manifesto to the site<sup>35</sup>—the question of how to assess the threat posed by these sites looms large. For those concerned with countering the urgent problem of far-right violence then the essential problem is in determining the transition from being an online troll into becoming a ‘real-world’ extremist. In closing we thus turn to the case of the Christchurch, New Zealand shooter, whose actions appear (at least upon first glance) to act out the ‘chan’ fantasy world of esoteric fascism, with the most tragic of consequences. In doing so, we may thus inquire into whether (and to what extent) the Christchurch shooter’s actions can be understood as a reflection of the esoteric fascist preoccupations of 4chan’s ‘keyboard warriors’.

Before murdering 50 congregants in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019, the shooter posted a manifesto to 8chan/pol/. The title for the manifesto, *The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society*, echoes themes in mainstream right-wing populist politicians as well as thinkers on the European New Right which argues for the defence of a supposedly autochthonous European culture from hostile incursion by alien forces working in cahoots with liberal elites.



Consistent with how the shooter sought to frame his own actions in the manifesto, he has largely been treated as an avatar of chan culture. Indeed, his manifesto was replete with sly references to chan culture from slang expressions — such, for example, as his repeated use of the ‘kebab’ as slur against Muslims — to his seemingly baffling claim that he was red-pilled by YouTube conservative pundit Candace Owens. As researchers more literate in chan culture have noticed, the manifesto may also be read as an instance of what is colloquially known in chan culture as ‘shitposting’ — referring to an exercise in media manipulation, which in this case was calculated to instil the idea that the shooter’s actions were symptomatic of alt-right anonymous chan culture in general.<sup>36</sup> Some media coverage of the event simply ignored the killer’s framing of his actions, following the lead of the members of the New Zealand government, who refused even to mention his name—an approach referred to as ‘strategic silencing’.<sup>37</sup> In spite of this strategy, the killer’s actions have very much become part of the mythos of anonymous chan culture where his name and likeness have become literally canonised, providing inspiration for others—indeed the subsequent El Paso mass shooter said as much in his own manifesto, a four-page document also posted to 8chan.

In the aftermath of the 2019 killings tied to 8chan, these killers appear to many as an embodiment of the toxic subculture of contemporary anonymous chan boards. Whilst the Christchurch shooter *did* aim to create the impression of himself as an avatar of a deeper reservoir of hatred bubbling up from the chan board, it would in fact be inaccurate to ascribe them too much agency. Although the Christchurch shooter’s actions clearly energised discussion on these boards (correlating to a large though brief uptick in the relative frequency of anti-Muslim slurs), his particular form of hatred differed somewhat from the norm. While the Christchurch shooter was, like many anons, preoccupied with alt-history, it appears that he had developed a somewhat idiosyncratic extremist perspective of his own, which emphasizes his own agency in his violent actions. We can get an empirical sense of this by looking at another of his ‘texts’, besides the manifesto, that being the actual weapons that he used in the killings, on which he had inscribed assorted arcane names, dates and historical events. In aggregate, the inscriptions on the Christchurch shooter’s weapons can be read as recounting a Manichaean narrative of an embattled ‘white world’—a theme on 4chan as well as amongst right-wing populist politicians. An overwhelming number of terms present on the Christchurch shooter’s weapons were dates of battles in European history. Judged by his *gun as text*, Christchurch shooter had developed an elaborate theory of the key points in Western military history focused primarily on the period of ‘Reconquista’ in Spain, the Crusades and assorted wars against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup> When querying these terms in archives of the /pol/ boards, what we find is that most of these terms were in fact relatively rarely used in either 4chan or 8chan. While this does not necessarily

diminish the severity of the potential threat as posed by these far-right discussion boards, it does complicate the theory that the shooter was merely an avatar of alt-right chan culture.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

To conclude, our research departed from the hypothesis that 4Chan /pol/ is giving a vernacular format to a long tradition of post-war far-right political thought. Departing from the historical account of post-war *esoteric fascism* as set out by Nicholas Goodrick-Clark, our research sought to introduce the reader to the ongoing significance of Julius Evola's ideas concerning the idea of white supremacist Holy War, and to identify instance of how this framework is engaged with in discussions about anonymous chan culture. As seen in their preoccupation with Evola's concept of Kali Yuga, across 4chan's alt-histories there is a sense of eternal return, as the wheel of time moves between the ages, and an apocalyptic preoccupation with death of the West at the hands of a Manichaean enemy. But while this new culture of hate appears similar in many ways to the one discussed by scholars of post-war fascism, in its vernacular forms it potentially poses a different kind of problem. Returning, by way of conclusion, to the opening image of a 'fashwave' meme, the point of researching these marginal discussions is that 4chan has long been acknowledged as the home of memes. In spite of its toxicity, this anonymous subculture has been remarkably productive of vernacular innovation. One explanation for this is that the high volume of posts to 4chan functions as a 'powerful selection machine' for the production of attention-grabbing memes.<sup>40</sup> While this explanation is consistent with the original concept of a meme as a 'unit of cultural transmission' subject to the competitive mechanisms of evolutionary biology, it does not sit particularly comfortably with the media studies literature on vernacular creativity and memes, the latter which emphasises the role of human agency.<sup>41</sup> Besides media studies, many disciplines within the humanities have convincingly critiqued Richard Dawkins' reduction of cultural transmission to epidemiology. While evolutionary biology may be unsuitable for discussing the development of complex ideas such as religion (the latter a favourite target of Dawkins), perhaps it may still offer insights into the dissemination of extremely simplistic and dangerous world-views couched in the pseudo-profound jargon of esoteric fascism. In the case on 4chan's Politically Incorrect board (/pol/), we see an example of the dynamics of this extreme form of memetic antagonism pushed to their furthest extreme. Whilst the peculiar and disturbing preoccupation with apocalypticism, Manichaean demonology and occult symbology described in this chapter has been studied by historians of the extreme-right, what is new is how this historical imaginary is being hybridised with memes and the subculture of the 'deep vernacular web'.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 While small in number, the alt-right managed to capture media attention precisely through their use and appreciation of existing web subculture in order to promote a highly reactionary, and often explicitly fascist, political message. As the alt-right skilfully manipulated journalists into amplifying their message, scholarly exposés should be careful not to exoticise this phenomenon.
- 2 Tuters, 'LARPing and Liberal Tears: Irony, Belief and Idiocy in the Deep Vernacular Web'.
- 3 Nagle, 'Paleocons for Porn'; Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*.
- 4 Currently represented in the public mind by the 4chan board, chan boards are distinguished from other contemporary social media by their anonymity and ephemerality, technical affordances that encourage the use of memes as a means by which users of 4chan demonstrate their in-group status.
- 5 Griffin, 'Interregnum or Endgame? the Radical Right in the "Post-Fascist" Era'; Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity*; Sedgewick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*; Ross, *Against the Fascist Creep*.
- 6 A note on this matter before proceeding, in researching the alt-right there is the concern that one's work might help legitimise an otherwise marginal phenomenon (see Phillips 2018). The criticism here is that some exposés on anonymous chan culture have bestowed them with 'a kind of atemporal, almost godlike power' (Phillips et al. 2017), in the process feeding into the fantasy of their outsized dark influence. Keeping this valid criticism in mind it is nevertheless important to consider the possibility of how anonymous chan culture may innovate new ways for the dissemination of old and potentially dangerous ideas.
- 7 Tuters et al., 'Post-Truth Protest: How 4chan Cooked Up the Pizzagate Bullshit'.
- 8 David, *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies*. Other variations of these so-called pills include 'black pills', which indicate a sort of hopelessness and push believers into desperation. 'Glorious pills' provide inspiration to continue the fight against liberal and all that is 'inglorious'.
- 9 This aspect of the article is indebted to Jack Wilson's insights and analysis.
- 10 Valencia-García, 'The Rise and Fall of the Far-Right in the Internet Age'.
- 11 This use of 'debris' by Baudet also echoes a prominent idea that Evola writes about in his books *Men among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist* (1953) and *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul* (1961). In both works Evola describes an elite group of traditionalist men who recognise the wrongs of the current era, describing them in the former as being 'among the ruins' of Western civilisation and in

- the latter as an elite ‘who are, so to speak, still on their feet among the ruins and dissolution, and who belong, more or less consciously, to that other [traditionalist] world’ (*Ride the Tiger*, 3).
- 12 Mersbergen, ‘Oikofobie? Boreaal? Immanent? Oftewel: wat zij Baudet?’.  
Credit goes to Daniel Jurg for having researched this aspect of the article.
  - 13 CommonSenseTV, ‘Thierry Baudet (FvD) over het woord Boreaal’.
  - 14 Valk and Floor, “‘Verboden” ideeën trekken hem aan’.
  - 15 Le Pen, ‘We Must Save Boreal Europe and the White World’.
  - 16 Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World: Politics, Religion, and Social Order in the Kali Yuga*.
  - 17 Griffin, ‘Interregnum or Endgame? the Radical Right in the “Post-Fascist” Era’.
  - 18 Evola, *The Metaphysics of War*, 64.
  - 19 Ibid., 65.
  - 20 Ibid. While Evola has long been a favourite of the extreme-right in Italy, until recently he was known primarily amongst esotericists and Anglo-academia. The recent translation of his political theory by the far-right publisher Arktos Media, profiled elsewhere in this volume, has made for intriguing discussions of Evola’s work between esotericists and ideologists of the far-right (see comment section in Hanegraaf 2017). In some ways, Evola’s brand of esoteric fascism produced an alternative variety of fascism, one that reached both into the past, but that held itself as distinct from Hitlerism. Because of this differentiation, Arktos has been able to repackage Evola’s ideologies into short pamphlet-length volumes with aesthetically attractive minimalist covers, taking advantage of Evola’s coded language. *Editor’s Note: See chapter 16*.
  - 21 Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, 53.
  - 22 Griffin, ‘Revolts Against the Modern World’.
  - 23 Goodrick-Clarke, 6.
  - 24 Somewhat akin to Nietzsche’s notion of the übermensch, under the influence of Max Stirner, Evola called for self-realisation of the fallen man of liberal democratic mass culture into the state of what he referred to as the Absolute Individual (see Sedgwick 2004, 99 and Ross 2017, 77).
  - 25 Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris*, 138. Whilst such universal myths of cyclical theories appear mind-bogglingly archaic, as the founding figure of modern comparative religious studies Mircea Eliade noted, they provide their believers with a means for renewal against foreigners (see Sedgwick 109–17).
  - 26 In seeking to break taboos whilst at the same time denying themselves the ultimate pleasure of sexual release as a means to cultivate awareness (vidya) as well as magical power (siddhis), there are undeniable parallels here with contemporary chan subcultural notions of ‘no-fap’, ‘red-pill’ and ‘meme magic’.
  - 27 From John Morgan’s introduction to *The Metaphysics of War* (Evola 2011, 14). Notably, in the post-68 period the European New Right developed its own anti-modern, anti-globalisation critique advocating for a pan-European ‘rooted’ tradition as a bulwark against the hegemony of US imperialism. In the eyes of some critics the European New Right has simply rebranded a moribund fascist ideology that had become off-limits in the post-war years (Griffin 2000). Others suggest that contemporary scientific findings concerning heredity as well as tribal psychology are odds with egalitarian ideology which renders the new cultural or ‘differential’ form of racism impregnable to those strategies developed by anti-racists in relation to the biological racism as for example espoused by Nazis.

- 28 Identitarianism is more fully explained in the introduction of this volume. See also José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).
- 29 Whilst interpretation of the Third Reich was further developed by Miguel Serrano, the high priestess of Esoteric Hitlerism and the Aryan myth more generally was Savitri Devi. Born Maximiani Portas in 1905, Devi was a French woman of Greek origins who studied in esoteric Hindu doctrine in India in the inter-war years coming to espouse the esoteric fascist belief that the renewal of Aryan society required the creation of a 'new man' unafraid to engage in spiritual violence, for whom Hitler was the archetype (see Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 88–106; Ross 2017: 133).
- 30 The seemingly single most popular icon in fashwave memes, the origin of the Black Sun image is credited to the former SS member Wilhelm Landig, whom also popularised the theories of Atlantis as well as the Hyperborean origins of the Aryan race (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 3). Heinrich Himmler used it in the design of an occult chamber in Wewelsburg castle, the latter which was intended to have been the future SS headquarters for the Third Reich.
- 31 Hine et al., 'A Longitudinal Measurement Study of 4chan's Politically Incorrect Forum and Its Effect on the Web'; Lobinger et al., 'The Pepe Dilemma: a Visual Meme Caught Between Humor, Hate Speech, Far-Right Ideology and Fandom'; Beran, '4chan: the Skeleton Key to the Rise of Trump'.
- 32 See Coleman, *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: the Many Faces of Anonymous*; Phillips, *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship Between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture*.
- 33 Ollab, '4chan's YouTube: A Fringe Perspective on YouTube's Great Purge of 2019'.
- 34 See de Zeeuw and Tuters, 'Teh Internet Is Serious Business: On the Deep Vernacular Web and Its Discontents'.
- 35 Hagen et al., 'Infinity's Abyss: An Overview of 8chan'.
- 36 Evans, 'Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch Mosque Massacre'.
- 37 Donovan and Boyd, 'The Case for Quarantining Extremist Ideas'.
- 38 As S.J. Pearce notes in Chapter 2 of this volume, as well as Louie Dean Valencia-García notes in Chapter 16, the history of Al-Andalus and the rhetoric of the Reconquista are sites in which the far-right have attempted to re-write history so that to erase the diverse religions and cultures that existed in the Iberian Peninsula prior to the arrival of Islam in 711 in order to invent an alt-history in which there was only a homogenous, traditionalist Christian culture.
- 39 Amongst other factors the Christchurch shooter should also be understood in light of the rise of violent Australian nativism, the so-called 'New Integrationism' ideology which seeks to exclude Muslim migrants (Poynting and Mason 2007).
- 40 Bernstein et al., 56.
- 41 Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 189–200; Burgess, *Vernacular Creativity and New Media*; Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*.

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*Figure 16.1* Richard Spencer (far left), and Daniel Friberg (far right) during a white nationalist rally Charlottesville, Virginia on 12 August 2017 that turned violent resulting in one death and multiple injuries. Kim Kelley-Wagner/Shutterstock.com.

## 16 The Rise and Fall of the Far Right in the Digital Age<sup>1</sup>

*Louie Dean Valencia-García*

Beginning in 2005, a small Danish company called Integral Tradition Publishing (ITP) began building what became a network of nationalists, traditionalists and white supremacists intent on creating an alternate vision of modernity—a lofty, if not seemingly impossible, task. The books they sold peddled the works of lesser-known fascist authors whose hands were seemingly less dirty—most prominently the Italian proto-fascist philosopher Julius Evola.<sup>2</sup> Today, Arktos Media, the British-based inheritor company to ITP, is headed by a former coal mining company CEO, Swedish nationalist Daniel Friberg. Friberg, who first entered the Swedish neo-Nazi skinhead scene in the 1990s, has staged music festivals, organised seminars and founded numerous media channels, digital and analogue, that have sought to make white nationalism mainstream.<sup>3</sup> Many of Arktos’ editors and authors are closely associated with proud American white nationalist Richard Spencer. Together, Spencer and Friberg even co-founded AltRight.com, a website designed as a bull-horn for their fascistic ideologies.<sup>4</sup> As a print and digital publisher with considerable reach, Arktos is one the largest dealers of alt-histories in the world today. In addition to short pamphlet-length literature, Arktos publishes alt-histories, pseudo-academic monographs, historical fiction novels and currently operates a journal that attempts to give off an academic façade.

The evolution of ITP/Arktos represents a seismic shift of far-right ideologies from the periphery to the centre, quite literally moving from Denmark to a Hare Krishna base in India to right-wing Hungary, and eventually settling somewhere between Sweden, London and Washington, DC—with employees and contributors scattered globally.<sup>5</sup> Arktos has grown into what Charles Lyons, who has served as both head of Arktos US and chief administrative officer, has called the ‘biggest publisher of traditionalist, conservative, nationalist, Identitarian and overall alt-right literature in the World’.<sup>6</sup> Arktos’ rise coincided with the ‘collapse of skinheadism and the rapid rise of the Sweden Democrats’<sup>7</sup>—a far-right party which in 2010 managed to gain representation in Sweden’s parliament despite having roots in earlier neo-Nazi movements.<sup>8</sup> As Benjamin Teitelbaum describes, ‘Revolutionary white nationalists

and neo-Nazis throughout the world have long showcased imagery of the North in their artwork, myths, and songs, praising Swedes as the quintessential members of the community they championed—as the “whitest of all whites”. The publisher’s name, ‘Arktos’, recalls a Greek centaur, the Greek name for the bear in the constellation Ursa Major, and is the root of the word ‘artic’—recalling ‘Northerness’.<sup>9</sup>

Arktos’ books are easily available via their own website and the internet retailer Amazon. YouTubers and message boards dedicate themselves to the ideals proposed by many of the authors published by Arktos—decrying democracy, globalism, multiculturalism, ‘cultural Marxism’<sup>10</sup> and ‘degeneracy’. Such coded language is often used to laud both misogyny and nationalism, whilst inciting Islamophobia. In this chapter, readers will be introduced to a hybrid print/digital publisher that has brought esoteric, fascist ideologies back from the grave. I will delve into various aspects of the media company, outlining ITP/Arktos’ history, while describing more broadly the ways its collaborators have used, and continue to use, both the internet and analogue media to promote fascistic ideologies. While most historians rightfully delineate historical fascism from neo-fascist groups today, we can still certainly identify fascist tendencies that apply more broadly. Although there is no ‘fascist checklist’, or a fascist minimum for that matter, there certainly is a moment in which fascist tendencies are easily recognisable.<sup>11</sup> To this end, I will draw historical lines between fascism in Mussolini’s Italy, Spain’s Falangism and neo-fascist youth movements in Europe today.

This chapter will analyse the publisher’s ideological underpinnings and explore how Arktos has promoted the rise of a fascistic, ‘Identitarian’ trans-European youth movement, ‘Génération Identitaire’ (Generation Identity), which has grown prominent in Austria, France, the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany, Spain, Italy, the United States and beyond. With an eye towards understanding Arktos’ extension vis-à-vis print and digital technologies, I will explore Arktos’ history, writers and publications to investigate the reception of that material in the public sphere.<sup>12,13</sup>

This chapter will provide general background information on the company’s origins and cultural milieu, explore some of its prominent figures, outline the philosophy behind the construction of history by some of ITP/Arktos’ authors and figures, analyse some of the influences and philosophies present in Arktos’ publications attempting to understand the fascistic tendencies present in those writings and will provide an in-depth analysis of the company’s use of digital and analogue platforms.

### **Rise of an Esoteric and Traditionalist Company**

In 2005, Jacob Christiansen Senholt (b. 1983), a student studying at Aarhus University in Denmark, and Patrick Boch (b. 1983), a recent graduate from the University of Buckingham in the United Kingdom, co-founded

an online bookstore and publishing company, ITP—registering the company in their home country, Denmark.<sup>14</sup> The company published several titles under its own imprint and sold books from other publishers on its website, IntegralTradition.com.<sup>15</sup> As Charles Robert Sullivan and Amy Fisher-Smith describe in chapter seven of this volume, ‘Integral Traditionalism developed in the early twentieth century as a repudiation of what it saw as a modernity that had abandoned the perennial wisdom that was the secret core of all religions’. ITP ostensibly sold and published texts on mysticism and the occult—books that promoted what the website described as ‘traditionalist’ and ‘esoteric’ worldviews. These ideologies often contained a *mélange* of nationalism and pre-modern religious practices—pre-Vatican II Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Sufism, various forms of Nordic and Roman paganism. Already, by the end of 2007, as many as 274,976 visits had been made to the ITP website.<sup>16</sup>

On ITP’s website, interested readers could find authors of the ‘European New Right’, a post-fascist Nationalist-Traditionalist ideology that arose in the aftermath of the Second World War. Nationalist-Traditionalists largely used so-called occult and traditionalist philosophy to obscure their fascistic ideologies.<sup>17</sup> Many of the books listed as ‘most popular’ on ITP’s website promoted both fascism and anti-liberalism, with titles such as *Metaphysics of War* (Julius Evola); *Religious Attitudes of the Indo-Europeans* (Hans F.K. Günther); *New Culture, New Right: Anti-Liberalism in Postmodern Europe* (Michael O’Meara). Evola was a proto-fascist philosopher, Günther a Nazi eugenicist and O’Meara an advocate for a white ethno-state. ITP’s most popular book, Evola’s *Metaphysics of War*, was also the first book published by their imprint. Evola (1898–1974) was an aristocrat who was a leader of the Italian Dadaist movement, a prominent collaborator with Nazi-Fascists and a philosopher who proposed ‘traditionalist’ ideology that was anti-egalitarian, anti-democratic, anti-liberal, anti-Christian and anti-Semitic.<sup>18</sup>

Despite decades of suppression of fascistic ideologies in the wake of the Nazi-Fascist genocide, today, new digital technologies have facilitated the creation of a space where such fervent nationalism (and neo-fascism) can once again find supporters—and more than just through Twitter, Reddit, 4chan, 8chan and other underbelly websites where fascistic ideologies fester.<sup>19</sup> While many elements of the radical right were suppressed in the decades following the Holocaust, today, neo-fascists, white nationalists, far-right traditionalists and new groups such as the ‘Identitarian Bloc’ have used the internet to form an interconnected global movement by creating what I call ‘digital imagined communities’—to borrow from political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson.<sup>20</sup> The internet has facilitated the ideological reconstitution of the far-right, bringing back hateful discourses that once were either

culturally taboo or illegal in many European countries after the Holocaust. While quicker knowledge distribution has sparked democratic uprisings—such as the Arab Spring—digital media publication has also allowed for the rise of anti-liberal, anti-democratic movements that extol ‘traditionalism’ and white nationalism.

Today, Arktos specialises in publishing mostly short, readable texts by resurrected proto-fascist and European New Right philosophers, and a hotchpotch of pseudo-historical and mythological works that seek to restore what many of the ITP/Arktos authors convey as a lost sense of white European identity.<sup>21</sup> Co-founder Jacob Senholt has described the European New Right as:

...a cultural and intellectual network presenting itself as working towards the preservation and rekindling of European culture, tradition and identity. It utilizes a metapolitical strategy aimed at inspiring a revolutionary change in the current cultural hegemony of the global liberal-democratic system, and works towards the establishment of new tribal communities.<sup>22</sup>

Rejecting pluralism, democracy and globalism, Nationalist-Traditionalism has found appeal amongst the disenfranchised libertarian-minded, religious, white, working class in Europe—and increasingly in the United States. Often, Nationalist-Traditionalists show a propensity for scapegoating minority groups. Whereas many practitioners of esotericism and traditionalism once eschewed Christianity as a non-European tradition,<sup>23</sup> ITP/Arktos has accepted more orthodox iterations of Christianity as a category of traditionalism.<sup>24</sup> Today, many of their most recent texts reflect an admixture of European paganism and more conservative iterations of Christianity.

Because of ITP, and publishers like it, the ideas of one of the founding figures of esoteric-traditionalist thought, Julius Evola, have gained new interest amongst this sect of right-wing extremists, particularly in the present-day writings (and YouTube rants) of Russian Traditionalist Alexander Dugin, who both publishes with Arktos and is a known advisor to Russian President Vladimir Putin.<sup>25</sup> However, this combination of nationalism and traditionalism is hardly new. Nationalist-Traditionalism was present in early Nazism,<sup>26</sup> and a Christianised version of this worldview also has precedent in the National-Catholicism found under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco in Spain (1936–1975).<sup>27</sup> Today’s Nationalist-Traditionalists have found common enemies in the Enlightenment values of rationalism, secularism and liberalism—an antagonism perhaps most infamously present in Steve Bannon’s worldview, a Catholic who has lauded nationalism and traditionalism and also served as White House Chief Strategist and campaign manager for American President Donald Trump.<sup>28</sup>

Arktos has unexpectedly become a nexus between Russian Nationalism, the European New Right and the American Alt-Right.<sup>29</sup> Through a case study of Arktos, we can better understand a rising anti-democratic, anti-liberal, anti-globalist, anti-modern, global network that desires a white ethno-state founded on 'traditionalist' ideologies. ITP/Arktos has recognised how print can be more effective than digital technology in some cases, and vice versa, allowing them to create a variety of ways to 'unite the right'—and to appeal to new audiences. In short, Arktos is attempting to play the long game, with the singular goal in mind: re-writing history by proposing a fascistic future. Arktos not only proposes to sell books, but more importantly intends to legitimate alternative visions of history and to disseminate them in the public sphere and the deep web, as articulated in Marc Tuters' chapter in this volume.

### ABCs of Arktos: People, Ideas and Movements

Over the last decade, ITP/Arktos has created a trans-European and global Nationalist-Traditionalist network, translating and editing texts that have appealed to supporters of both nationalist and neo-traditionalist ideologies. As a point of comparison, in the late summer of 2017, Arktos had 43,130 followers on Facebook, while Verso Books, a well-respected, leftist-leaning academic publishing house founded in 1970, had 77,738 followers.<sup>30,31</sup> While seemingly a small publisher, with fewer than 200 total publications to its name, Arktos certainly is attempting to position itself as a bridge to popularise far-right ideologies. The company website has described itself as such:

**ARKTOS MEDIA** is the result of a novel idea that was arrived at simultaneously by several individuals scattered across many parts of the globe, causing us to combine forces to bring this idea to fruition. The basis of this idea is our common observation that there are a growing number of individuals who believe that something has gone terribly wrong with the modern world.<sup>32</sup>

To better understand the mostly male-dominated ITP/Arktos, it is useful to understand where many of the main actors come from, as well as their ideological agendas, particularly, co-founder Jacob Senholt, former editor John Morgan, C.E.O. Daniel Friberg and former editor Jason Reza Jorjani.

In August 2017, on his Academia.edu page, a social media platform for academics, ITP/Arktos co-founder Jacob Senholt described his expertise as ranging from 'Western esoterism to Vedic theology and includ[ing] religio-political movements, such as the New Right'.<sup>33</sup> Senholt's research interests included: Indo-European Studies; Traditionalism; Julius Evola; the New Right; Counter-Enlightenment; Antimodernism; Aryanism;

and Fascism.<sup>34</sup> Obviously, the study of these topics is not inherently problematic; however, there is certainly a difference between the study of far-right/fascistic ideologies and beliefs and the active promotion of them. Through their publications, ITP/Arktos has promoted many of these ideologies listed by Senholt. However, to Senholt's credit, as early as 2014, on his own personal website, he claimed to be a strong supporter of democracy and rejected totalitarianism.<sup>35,36,37</sup> Senholt went on to defend his doctoral dissertation on 1 September 2017, titled, *Identity Politics of the European New Right: Inspirations, Ideas and Influence*. The dissertation was directed by Ole Morsing and Mark Sedgwick, both of Aarhus University in Denmark. On his blog, *Traditionalists: A Blog for the Study of Traditionalism and the Traditionalists*, following Senholt's dissertation defence, Mark Sedgwick published this announcement:

A PhD dissertation on the New Right, covering...the impact of Traditionalism, has just been successfully defended at Aarhus University... In the dissertation, Senholt distinguishes three main inspirations: the "Counter-Enlightenment" from Herder onwards, the Conservative Revolution from Spengler onwards, and Traditionalism from Guénon onwards. Even if New Right thinkers sometimes criticize Traditionalism and try to distance themselves from it, its impact still remains clear.

For ideas, Senholt stresses especially "metapolitics," the idea that politics can be changed by changing the way issues are conceived and discussed. For influence, Senholt notes that the New Right is suddenly important and everywhere. This, he thinks, is because circumstances have changed, not because the New Right has. The New Right has actually been saying much the same thing for thirty years, without having much impact. Now, suddenly, issues relating to identity, to migration and globalization, have given it traction.

A fine dissertation.<sup>38</sup>

Responding to this announcement was John Morgan, who posted, 'Congratulations to Dr. Senholt, in the hope that he will continue the work of making *alternative* viewpoints better-known in the Academy'.<sup>39</sup> Sedgwick's blog has become a sort of node connecting scholars of traditionalism and traditionalist activists.<sup>40</sup> While Senholt's dissertation is not yet available publicly at the time of this writing, one reader of that work has privately commented to me that they were 'disturbed by his evasiveness and attempts to airbrush out fascism and neo-Nazism in the background of some of his Scandinavian fellow travellers in it'.<sup>41</sup>

Beginning in 2007, the ITP website listed the aforementioned John Morgan (b. 1973) as a member of the team. Some years later, in public events, Morgan was presented as one of the co-founders of ITP, despite not being listed on the original ITP website or in the initial filing

documents for either ITP or Arktos.<sup>42</sup> Morgan's ITP biography described him as interested in traditionalist perspectives, the European New Right and mysticism. He has translated the work of fascist/traditionalist philosopher Julius Evola. Ardently devoted to his mission, Morgan lived amongst Hare Krishnas for five years in India during ITP/Arktos' early years—later moving Arktos' operations to Budapest from Mumbai.<sup>43</sup> He later became both Editor-and-Chief and a director of Arktos.

By the spring of 2010, the ITP website posted the company was 'no more' and had been 'supplanted' by Arktos. The announcement proclaimed:

Arktos is the result of a collaboration between the former staff of Integral Tradition Publishing and some new colleagues in Scandinavia. While we retain many of the same aims that ITP had, with Arktos we believe that we have crafted something that is genuinely unique. With our catalogue...we want to provide the resources for individuals of many different inclinations to find alternatives to the onslaught of modernity.<sup>44</sup>

The transition from ITP to Arktos began a shift from a focus on occultism to one that more explicitly supported white nationalism.

Arktos was registered in the United Kingdom in 2009, listing Boch as its founding director (who at the time was residing in Powai, Mumbai). Initially, ITP was a 50% shareholder of Arktos, while a company called NFSE Media AB, based in Gothenburg, Sweden, owned the other half—represented by Swede Daniel Friberg (b. 1978). NFSE Media AB (with its legal name being listed as Motpol AB) was established in 2005 as a magazine and sound recording publisher, for which Friberg was listed as its director.<sup>45</sup>

Senholt was appointed as a second director of Arktos on 1 January 2010, with Friberg listed as third director as of 28 January 2010.<sup>46</sup> From Arktos' founding until 2016, Friberg also served many directorial positions at Wiking Mineral (now called Svenska Bergsbruk)—a Swedish mining company founded in 2005. For a publishing company founded on a rejection of modernity and globalism, Arktos' team heavily relied upon technology and globalism to both communicate amongst each other and to connect to potential customers. Moreover, by living in India, Arktos' staff reduced production and living costs. Senholt and Boch officially left their director positions at Arktos in 2011 and 2012.<sup>47</sup>

Already in 2012, Friberg was hosting a seminar called 'Identitarian Ideas', which in that year was themed 'Identity Geopolitics: Towards a Multi-Polar World'. One observer noted that participants of the conference wore '[p]ressed khakis, wingtips, suits, and cherry-red sweaters on top of button-up shirts'.<sup>48</sup> As Cynthia Miller-Idriss argues, 'clothing acts as a potential gateway to far right scenes, facilitating access,



communicating political views, helping far right youth find others with similar opinions and attitudes, and providing some measure of credibility to insiders'.<sup>49</sup> By consistently wearing preppy clothing, the far-right has attempted to normalise their ideologies into mainstream society through their aesthetic. These far-right 'identitarians' look more like they belong to the William F. Buckley conservatism of the mid-twentieth century than the skinheads of the late twentieth century. Friberg, through the promotion of an aesthetic, has attempted to convey a certain legitimacy. One will note that the aesthetic of Arktos is crisp, yet still harkens to images that recall a sort of mythological past of Vikings, Celts and the like.

Friberg was also co-founder of the so-called 'metapolitical think-tank' Motpol (NFSE Media AB).<sup>50</sup> According to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, Friberg and Motpol were also listed as the administrative contact for Metapedia.org, a Wiki website billed as 'the alternative encyclopedia', catering to far-right ideologies and interpretations of history.<sup>51</sup> In the spring of 2017, Friberg, now C.E.O. of Arktos, said, 'After more than a century of retreat, marginalization and constant concessions to an ever more aggressive and demanding left, the true European right is returning with a vengeance'.<sup>52</sup> This assertion of a 'true European right' implies that other contemporary right-affiliated parties are somehow inauthentic—suggesting that the true right, a more fascistic and traditionalist right, was the 'true' right.

More recently, Arktos built a coalition with American white nationalist Richard Spencer (b. 1978), a prominent figurehead for the American Alt-Right movement. Spencer has called for a 'peaceful ethnic cleansing' in the United States and Europe,<sup>53</sup> and currently serves as president and director of the innocuous sounding 'National Policy Institute', which is in fact a white nationalist think tank based in the United States. Spencer is also known for organising white nationalist rallies at public universities and spaces nationwide, which have increasingly contained contingents of self-proclaimed Nazis, neo-fascists and the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>54,55</sup> Spencer, while studying his PhD in modern European intellectual history,<sup>56</sup> claims to have mentored American President Donald Trump's senior policy advisor, Stephen Miller (b. 1985), when the two participated in Duke University's Conservative Union.<sup>57,58,59</sup> Spencer dropped out of his doctoral program; Miller went on to serve as the founding national coordinator for the Terrorism Awareness Project, an alarmist organisation that stokes fear of Muslims, and then to the White House.<sup>60</sup> The US-based Southern Poverty Law Center further exposed Miller's own far-right connections and ideologies in a more recent investigation.<sup>61</sup>

In January 2017, Spencer and Friberg launched the incendiary AltRight.com—a far-right website run by Arktos collaborators under the co-editorship of the two men. RightOn.net, another far-right propaganda website previously operated by Friberg, soon redirected to AltRight.com, incorporating much of its previous content.<sup>62</sup>

The website's aesthetic was both minimalist and relatively well-designed; at its launch, the website claimed, 'The challenge for us is to be as accessible as possible—to reach new hearts and minds—while being as as [*sic*] groundbreaking and challenging as possible'.<sup>63</sup> The website's masthead listed Richard Spencer as its American editor, and Daniel Friberg as its European Editor, Irani-American and Lecturer at the New Jersey Institute of Technology,<sup>64</sup> Jason Reza Jorjani (b. 1981), as its culture editor, and a Hungary-based Swede, Tor Westman (b. 1988), as its technical director. All sat on the AltRight.com's board of directors.<sup>65</sup> In the summer of 2017, Friberg served as Arktos' C.E.O., Jorjani as editor-in-chief, Westman as chief marketing officer. All three were registered as directors of Arktos.<sup>66</sup>

Jorjani, who quickly took a prominent role in the Alt-Right globally, received his BA and MA from New York University, and his PhD in philosophy from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Beginning in October 2016, Jorjani served as Editor-and-Chief of Arktos. Jorjani has described himself as '...an Iranian-American and native New Yorker of Persian and northern European descent'.<sup>67</sup> During this time, Jorjani's work particularly was interested in the so-called 'Iranian Renaissance', promoting a vision of Iran as white and Aryan, calling the Persian Empire the 'world's greatest 'Aryan Imperium'—seen in Jorjani's writing about the thirteenth-century Persian poet, Rumi.<sup>68</sup>

Jorjani's connection with the Arktos and the Alt-Right even came to the attention of his doctoral alma mater, SUNY at Stony Brook. The department discussed the alumnus in a meeting held in the autumn of 2016. In the department's meeting minutes, one unidentified faculty member stated,

One of our Ph.D. alumni is involved in the Aryan white supremacist movement. Is easily accessible on the internet. I have watched a couple of his videos and they are appropriately described as Aryan white supremacist, couched in Western philosophical tradition.<sup>69</sup>

Denying that he was a white supremacist, in a fit of outrage, just shortly before the launch of AltRight.com, an indignant Jorjani posted an open letter titled 'Forever Deplorably Yours',<sup>70</sup> to RightOn.com, Friberg's propaganda website:

I am the Editor-in-Chief of the leading press of the New Right or Alt-Right...These movements are connected by an Indo-European philosophical tradition that extends back through Heidegger and the Kyoto School to Nietzsche, Schelling, Hegel, Bruno, Suhrawardi, Plato, Aristotle, Heraclitus, Gautama Buddha, and Zarathustra. This Aryan heritage has roots in the Earth that are thousands of years old and the branches of its tree will grow through distant star

systems...To imagine that you can label my thought “NeoNazi” or “White Supremacist” and then file me away in your prison of pre-fab and facile categorizations is delusional and it only demonstrates your own spiritual poverty.<sup>71</sup>

Jorjani’s attempt to tie Persia today to an Aryan heritage—claiming this heritage as being rooted in the earth, or soil—is significant. It mirrors a fascist belief in ‘bodenständigkeit’, a sort of ‘rootedness in the soil’.<sup>72</sup>

As Jorjani alludes, bodenständigkeit was a belief propagated by the aforementioned philosopher, Martin Heidegger, as well as Nazi eugenicist Hans Günther,<sup>73</sup> who believed that what distinguished Germans from Jews was the German connectedness to the soil, as opposed to the supposed ‘uprootedness’ of the Jews.<sup>74</sup> As Dontella Di Cesare explains:

[R]ootlessness had a broader meaning for Heidegger than simply the lack of one’s own land...The Jews were not the only nomads, devoid of a land and state—or, rather, incapable of creating the political structure of a state. Their rootlessness was considered as that unboundness...The absence of one’s own land, also seen as the lack of a background and a foundation, was a peculiarity of a superficial way of existing, without ties—in fact, with a breaking of ties. Above all, a breaking of the tie with Being.<sup>75</sup>

In essence, without being, those who are ‘unbound’ from the soil are denied their humanity. Although Heidegger was an advocate of this belief, it was far from exclusive to his philosophy as the nineteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant understood the ‘servant-master’ relationship had ‘inextricably conferred upon the Jewish people a condition of perpetual slavery’.<sup>76</sup> This concern for ‘rootedness’ flowed from Kant to G.W.F. Hegel to Friedrich Nietzsche to Günther, Heidegger and Evola to the New Right of the 1960s to Alexander Dugin, the Identitarian movement and the authors promoted by Arktos today.<sup>77</sup>

For Jorjani to be accepted by white nationalists like Richard Spencer—the two even sharing living and work quarters for a time in the Arlington/Washington, DC area—,<sup>78</sup> it made sense that Jorjani emphasise his own whiteness—most likely why he adamantly claimed both Northern European heritage in conjunction with an Aryan-Persian identity. By connecting Aryan identity to Persian soil, Jorjani could lay claim to whiteness and European identity. To be sure, Jorjani’s insistence to claim Persian Aryan blood is also part of the very real question of where Europe (and the West) ends, and what does it mean to be white.

In fact, a version of this bodenständigkeit discourse even made its way into popular rhetoric used at white supremacist rallies—particularly in the Richard Spencer-organised protest against the removal of statues

in Charlottesville, Virginia that celebrated the racist American Confederacy, where violent protestors marched chanting ‘Blood and Soil!’<sup>79</sup> Notably, Daniel Friberg walked side-by-side with Spencer (seen in the earlier image). In Charlottesville, one white supremacist reporter for *The Daily Stormer*, a far-right propaganda publication, commented to a reporter for *VICE* that the racist movement wants to show they are not ‘atomized individuals’—that they are more than an internet community. The reporter emphasised the goal of removing ‘degenerate’ populations from ‘white countries’ (read: ethnic cleansing).<sup>80</sup> Importantly, as that white supremacist reporter makes clear, although much of the organising is occurring online, it is important for those individuals to be a visible force in the public sphere—a ‘counterpublic’ as it were.<sup>81</sup>

When this violence broke out, Jorjani was in San Francisco, California meeting with computer scientist, Jacques Vallée, whose work with ARPANET contributed to the creation of the modern internet.<sup>82</sup> At about the same time, Jorjani also claimed to have been in ‘a private meeting concerning research and development of exotic technology that may someday serve the Iranian Air Force’.<sup>83</sup> Jorjani was making steps towards leaving Arktos to start a new organisation, the so-called ‘Iranian United Front’, to bring together what he called ‘the most well established and prominent nationalist political parties of Iran together into a single coalition, one that transcends the division between monarchists and republicans’.<sup>84</sup> On his personal blog, Jorjani indicated his intention to sell his shares of the Alt-Right Corporation to Friberg and Spencer so that they might stay with its leadership. He warned:

...from now on, former associates within the Alt-Right movement of Europe and North America ought to consider any interactions with me as diplomatic relations with a representative of the coming post-Islamic political order of Iran and the wider Persianate world. This point cannot be overemphasized. Over the next few years, we will be watching with a hawk’s eye to identify the true friends and enemies of our archeo-futurist Iran.<sup>85</sup>

In an email sent out in late 30 August, Arktos announced the appointment of Charles Lyons, a regular contributor for Alt-Right.com, as chief administrative officer and Head of Arktos US, taking over Jorjani’s duties. As of this writing, Jorjani planned to continue his advocacy for the Iranian United Front, but was suspended in September 2017 from his position at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, a public university in Newark, after a video of him circulated online promising the return of concentration camps in Europe, as well as Adolf Hitler’s image to European monies.<sup>86,87</sup> To be sure, Jorjani, a formative figure in the current vision of Arktos, has moved from lightly espousing fascistic ideals to advocating for what many would describe as Nazism.

## Does History Repeat Itself?: Cyclical History and the Rebirth of Far-Right Ideology

In 2006, ITP's website pronounced an affinity for orthodox texts—whether 'Vedic-Aryan, Islamic or Catholic'.<sup>88</sup> ITP posited a belief in the 'cycle of meta-history'—what their website described as golden, silver, bronze and iron ages.<sup>89</sup> For this small Danish company, the contemporary historical moment represented a so-called iron age, the low point in the cycle. Ironically, despite being a transnational online company, many of the works sold by ITP rejected both globalism and modernity. ITP desired to restart the so-called metahistorical cycle—to begin a new golden age.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, if Francis Fukuyama declared the 'end of history' in the 1990s,<sup>91</sup> ITP sought to restore some imagined, lost past (that never really existed), thus restarting the cycle. To do this, ITP/Arktos promoted what I call 'alt-histories'—alternative imaginings of the historical past (or, to borrow from United States Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway, what we might call 'alternative facts', or false or intentionally misrepresented facts, which I argue are reconstructed into alternate histories that are used to legitimate a political régime) so that to construct a new sort of future based on that imagined, ahistorical past. The Alt-Right's project, in tantamount, advocates for a white ethno-state, spanning from Europe to the United States legitimated by an imagined homogeneous past. Despite being a refrain repeated ad nauseam to historians, history only repeats itself when people no longer see themselves as historical actors. History only repeats itself when we do not learn from our mistakes, or worse, fail to recognise them.

Established by many of the original ITP collaborators, most of whom no longer are with the company, Arktos dominates the field of far-right publishing, and has published and translated authors with the purpose of radically transforming the conservative and neoliberal right—calling forth a return of the 'real right', as Arktos C.E.O., Daniel Friberg, articulates in his less-than-eloquent manifesto work published in 2015.<sup>92</sup> Today, Arktos publishes books in 17 European languages, with titles such as *Dissent Dispatches: An Alt-Right Guide to Christian Theology*; *A Handbook for Right-Wing Youth*; *The Colonisation of Europe*; *The Indo-Europeans: In Search of the Homeland*; and *Against Democracy and Equality: The European New Right*—just to name a few. While Arktos' publications rarely evoke the term 'fascism' directly, when taken together, the hundreds of books published by Arktos reflect a fascistic, far-right, white supremacist ideology. Indeed, the term 'fascist' or 'neo-fascist' might simply not be adequate to describe Arktos' neo-traditionalist, Alt-Right, Identitarian thought. The aforementioned recent publications, Alt-Right/far-right guides, false histories and apocalyptic mythic tales, targeted towards Christians and young people, hint to where the Alt-Right/New Right seeks to expand its membership.

Former editor-in-chief John Morgan said in a speech given in 2015 at *Identitarian Ideas*, an annual far-right conference held by the publisher:

What Arktos is trying to do could perhaps be summarized as trying to find alternatives to Modernity. Which basically means alternatives to the current liberal order, which is based on individualism and materialism, and the dominance of the state over every aspect of its people, which runs contrary to anything traditional or communitarian, and it's spread everywhere across the world...Arktos' idea is that we should take a broad approach to the desire to seek an alternative to liberalism.<sup>93</sup>

In that talk, Morgan also cited Michael O'Meara's *New Culture, New Right* and Tomislav Sunić's *Against Democracy and Equality: The European New Right*, both of whom draw from Alain de Benoist and the French-based ethno-nationalist think tank GRECE (Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne). Morgan makes his rejection of modernity clear, as well as his diagnosis of what is to be done<sup>94</sup>:

[T]he radical liberals have managed to convince the vast majority of people that the mode of life we are in today is something completely normal...Therefore, what we need to do is to imitate their example, but in our own way. This means waging war on the cultural as well as the political level. It may be difficult to discern on the surface how books on political philosophy...help in this endeavor, but I would argue that it is very difficult to motivate people simply using straight-forward political arguments...People need a vision of the future that can inspire them, and give them something not only to fight for, but to give them motivation in their daily lives. I believe that books remain one of the best ways of instilling this sort of vision in people.<sup>95</sup>

Here, Morgan describes Arktos' 'metapolitical' strategy to launch a culture war that inspires nationalism—that seeks to 'return' the West to the 'traditions' of the past. Morgan also imagines some sort of pure past where culture has not been corrupted. For Morgan, and similarly minded traditionalists, modernity represents a break from heritage; he does not see culture as pluralistic and in motion. Like Nazi-Fascists before him, anything that does not fit into his imagined Golden Age mythology is degeneracy.

Morgan remarks, if he were to pick one term to describe Arktos, he would borrow the term 'true right', which he describes as coined by the 'Italian traditionalist philosopher Evola', who defined it as 'those principles which were accepted and seen as normal by every well-born person

everywhere in the world prior to 1789'. By marking 1789, Morgan (and Evola) clearly references the French Revolution as the epicentre of liberal democracy. Moreover, by citing the emphases on 'well-born' Morgan and Evola express a desire for the classism, castes and hierarchies of the Old Régime—a world before the wide acceptance of democracy, equality or egalitarianism. Morgan argues:

...[I]f we are to defeat our liberal, globalist enemy, we ourselves must adopt an alternative form of globalism, seeking alliances and common ground with individuals and groups who share our interests everywhere, even outside of Europe...Only together, by working with nationalists and traditionalists everywhere can we succeed.<sup>96</sup>

While Senholt and Boch had left Arktos, Morgan continued his affiliation with Arktos until spring 2017, when in-fighting with Friberg resulted in Morgan's dismissal.<sup>97,98</sup> With Morgan's ouster, Daniel Friberg had wrestled control over the print and digital publishing fiefdom of the European Alt-Right.<sup>99</sup> One might speculate that Arktos' toleration of non-European traditionalist schools of thought might continue to be diminished in Arktos' catalogue in the years to come, given Morgan's departure and particular interest in the occult.

Both Boch and Morgan were excoriated online in an article written by Arktos in June 2017 for having had raised questions of embezzlement against Friberg, which were never proven. At the end of the incident, which resulted in the dismissal of several members of the Arktos staff, frozen PayPal accounts and legal action, Arktos, as a company, told their side of the situation, calling attention to Boch, who was referred to as the former accountant for Arktos instead of as co-founder and former director. The incident highlighted some of the internal weakness within the organisation—e.g. a reliance Arktos has on the internet. Without the internet payment service, PayPal, the company was in peril. The incident also demonstrated ways racism has caused problems internally within Arktos. To diminish the accusations of embezzlement lodged by Boch and Morgan, Arktos stated in a straw-man attack: 'Curiously, Boch is a member of the Hare Krishna cult—famous around the world for panhandling and its hokey moralizing—and is married to and has a family with a woman of dark complexion'. The article also noted Morgan's time as a Hare Krishna.<sup>100</sup> These critiques attempted to discredit the men in what can be understood as a racialised attack against Boch for marrying a 'woman of dark complexion' and against Morgan for having been a Hare Krishna during his time in India. To treat what amounts to melatonin quantity and religious practices as an accusation indeed highlights the ways racism plays out even inside of the far-right publisher.

Since leaving Arktos, Morgan has gone on to join as a book editor for the ethno-nationalist publisher Counter-Currents, which also publishes and distributes many of the same authors as Arktos.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, the Counter-Currents website echoes some of the type of language previously found on ITP:

Counter-Currents Publishing, Ltd., takes its guiding principles from French Traditionalist René Guénon's *The Crisis of the Modern World*...History is cyclical, and its prevailing current is downward, declining from a Golden Age through Silver and Bronze Ages to a Dark Age...We live in a Dark Age, in which decadence reigns and all natural and healthy values are inverted.<sup>102</sup>

### Is Arktos Fascist?: Tracing a Tradition

In 2007, ITP's website listed books by authors such as Italian traditionalist/fascist thinker, Julius Evola, far-right French nationalist and founder of the *Action Française* journal, Charles Maurras (1868–1952), and Michael O'Meara (b. 1946), author of *New Culture, New Right: Anti-Liberalism in Postmodern Europe*, amongst numerous other far-right authors. The website described itself as being 'devoted to distributing and publishing books on traditionalism, metapolitics, initiation, esoterism and the crisis of the modern world. We also carry books on the religious traditions of Europe and beyond, including the Indo-European, Christian and Islamic traditions'.<sup>103</sup>

From its beginning, ITP/Arktos heavily promoted the work of far-right philosopher Julius Evola, whose ideas were popular amongst fascist thinkers and in the press under Benito Mussolini. Politically, Evola located himself to the right of fascism. Like many of his fascist contemporaries, Evola wanted to eschew modernity to restore an imagined, glorious past,<sup>104</sup> delving into a sort of occultism that obscured the rhetoric of his fascistic ideologies. In the wake of the Second World War, Evola's ideologies became heavily coded as 'traditionalism' as a means of survival in an intellectual world that no longer tolerated the xenophobia of fascism as it had during and prior to the Holocaust and the deaths of millions of people.

This coded far-right ideology was especially important for Evola's philosophical survival given fascism's disfavour in postwar Europe.<sup>105</sup> Today, Evola's coded language has become useful for a European far-right living in a climate that until recently did not tolerate hate speech, having learned that toleration of intolerant hate speech, a form of violence in and of itself, only allows for more violent actions to escalate. Europeans, generally, had learned that to tolerate intolerance was to become a bystander to hate.<sup>106</sup> This was understood as the 'paradox of tolerance', or the way in which tolerating intolerance can ultimately only



lead to more extreme intolerance writ large—an idea first elaborated by Viennese Jewish philosopher Karl Popper in his 1945 magnum opus *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.<sup>107</sup>

In the second half of the twentieth century, the tragedy of the Holocaust became Europe's rationale for a popular belief in the value of pluralism. Despite this new pluralism, Evola's writing has continued to inspire far-right ideologues.<sup>108</sup> Today, the far right fights for Evola's idealised 'traditional' past rooted in a pre-Enlightenment, imagined, homogenous idea of Europe—one that never was.<sup>109</sup> In fact, American white nationalist Richard Spencer has called Evola 'one of the most fascinating men of the twentieth century'.<sup>110</sup> According to Mark Sedgwick, one of the dissertation advisors of ITP/Arktos co-founder Christian Senholt, the Greek far-right party, Golden Dawn, lists Evola first on their recommended reading list.<sup>111</sup>

While many of the ITP/Arktos authors frame their ideologies not as explicitly fascist (in the pre-Second World War sense of the term), many of the authors, such as Evola, certainly considered themselves fascistic, and even to the right of fascist ideology. Similar to how the Spanish Falange founder José Antonio Primo de Rivera was not strictly an Italian fascist, he certainly was a follower of Mussolini's ideologies and held fascistic ideologies. ITP/Arktos' authors and followers' ideologies are inheritors of this fascist past, and in many ways are reanimating a sort of zombie fascism that avoids calling itself as such to avoid criticism, as virulent as ever—whether disguised as 'the New Right' or the 'Alt-Right', the ideologies are contemporary iterations of fascism.

ITP/Arktos' careful selection of authors often has skirted explicitly fascist ideologies (that is to say the books are often ideologically close to fascism, but not explicitly fascist *avant la lettre*). Like historical Nazi-Fascism, many of the works sold by ITP/Arktos positioned themselves as anti-modernist. The books sold and published by the company were either predecessors to fascism (Evola), or arose in the aftermath of the Second World War (the New Right), giving plausible deniability to their Nazi-Fascist roots—especially important given the sensitivity to Nazi-Fascist propaganda in most European countries. As Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg have demonstrated, the lineage from the European New Right to early twentieth-century fascist ideology is clear.<sup>112</sup>

## Meta-Histories and Politics

Like how Nazi Germany looked to the pre-Weimar years, Spain's Falange to its imperial past and Italian Fascists to the fallen Roman Empire, the works published by ITP/Arktos have looked towards an imagined past where Europe was 'pure' to reconstruct an idealised future where a white ethno-state could exist—to accomplish this they claim to use

‘metapolitics’ to deconstruct what they see as a leftist cultural hegemony that has been in place since at least the post-Second World War era. Jacques Marlaud (1944–2014), the former President of the GRECE—a French-based ethno-nationalist think tank founded in 1968 by philosopher and founder of the European ‘Nouvelle Droite’ (New Right), Alain de Benoist (b. 1943), a dominant far right academic school of thought—defined their so-called metapolitics as

any work of reflection or analysis, any diffusion of ideas, any cultural practice liable to influence political society over the long term. It is no longer a matter of taking power but of providing those in power with ideological, philosophical, and cultural nourishment that can shape (or contradict) their decisions.<sup>113</sup>

That is to say, their far-right project is intended to operate so that to move those in power further towards what they saw as an alternative politics. This ‘metapolitics’ posited a ‘third way’ separate from a left/right binary—a new type of politics supposedly drawing from pre-Enlightenment thought. The New Right employs what Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg call ‘right wing Gramscism’ to overturn the supposed liberal-leftist cultural hegemony.<sup>114</sup> In reality, this ‘third way’ reflects echoes of fascistic ideologies harkening back to Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Julius Evola.

The word ‘fascist’ can be a difficult one to negotiate, as much of the writing by followers of GRECE does not explicitly claim fascism; however, they certainly lend themselves to fascist tendencies.<sup>115</sup> Followers of GRECE have blamed liberalism (in the broadest sense of the word—including, but not limited to, democratic systems of governance based on the ideas of equality and pluralism) for the rejection of ‘traditional’ beliefs—primarily scapegoating ‘cultural Marxism’ for a decadent and degenerate modern worldview. While the New Right claims disdain for ‘cultural Marxism’, they, too, draw on Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s theories of cultural hegemony—hoping to use Gramsci’s theoretical frameworks to flip what they see as the dominance of ‘cultural Marxism’ in Western society today. This is partially due to the historical moment in which GRECE was founded—in the midst of Europe’s youth revolt, May ’68 and the Hippy ‘Summer of Love’—GRECE vilified leftist philosophical thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse (and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory), who taught a generation of influential leaders and scholars such as Angela Davis, Abbie Hoffman and Kathy Acker. For GRECE, and its inheritor ideologues, such as the Identitarians, the May ’68ers are to blame for the rejection of traditionalism in Europe. They believe young people were seduced by the likes of French philosophers Marcuse and Guy Debord into believing in what they would call a degenerate worldview.

Arktos has even published the English language translation of one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's advisors, the aforementioned Alexander Dugin—known for posting Islamophobic rants and videos that strongly support American president Donald Trump on YouTube.<sup>116</sup> In 2014, the self-proclaimed platform for the American Alt-Right,<sup>117</sup> *Breitbart News*, under the stewardship of Steve Bannon, called Dugin 'Putin's Rasputin'.<sup>118</sup> Bannon has even hinted at knowledge of Dugin's esoteric-traditionalist inspiration, even citing Julius Evola in an interview.<sup>119</sup> Dugin sees himself as an inheritor of both the ideologies of GRECE and Evola. This was particularly surprising at the time due to Evola's name recognition being primarily limited to followers of the New Right and scholars of fascism.

In fact, Arktos' website even featured photos of Dugin at a meeting held with Arktos' staff in India.<sup>120</sup> Dugin, a grizzled, bearded man that strikes a remarkable resemblance to the infamous mystic and advisor, Rasputin, has written numerous books published by Arktos, including: *The Fourth Political Theory* (2012), *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism* (2014), *Putin vs Putin: Vladimir Putin Viewed from the Right* (2014), *The Rise of the Fourth Political Theory* (2017). Significantly, Dugin also wrote *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning* for Washington Summit Publishers (2014), the publishing arm of Richard Spencer's National Policy Institute. In the work, Dugin explicitly connects his own philosophy to that of the Nazi philosopher.<sup>121</sup> To raise money to publish and translate Dugin's work, Arktos even has used the digital fundraising platform, Kickstarter.<sup>122</sup> Once published, these books are typically sold on the Arktos website and on the online retailer, Amazon. To be sure, while Dugin's stage presence is lacking, the company has managed to find ways to promote him online.

Most of the Dugin translations for Arktos were done by Canadian Michael Millerman, who translated many of these while studying a PhD in political science at the University of Toronto under the supervision of Ruth Marshall. These translated works include: *The Fourth Political Theory* (2012), *The Last War of the World-Island: Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia* (2015), *The Rise of The Fourth Political Theory* (2017), and *Ethnos and Society* (2018). Millerman's personal website references forthcoming work, including: *Foundations of Ethnoscology*, *Political Platonism*, and *Theory of a Multipolar World*.<sup>123</sup> Millerman's dissertation, defended in 2018, was titled *Beginning with Heidegger: A Comparative Study of Four Receptions of Martin Heidegger by Political Thinkers*. As a graduate student, Millerman claims he was punished instead of rewarded for introducing his department to Dugin's philosophy. After having had four of his dissertation committee members quit during the process, indicating clear difficulty in finding a place for Dugin's philosophy in the academy, Millerman decided to leave academia (for now).<sup>124</sup>

In his 2014 doctoral dissertation proposal, Millerman wrote about his own exposure to Dugin's philosophy in a lecture on what Dugin calls the 'Fourth Political Theory'. Millerman writes:

Besides piquing my interest sufficiently to motivate me to translate his book *The Fourth Political Theory*, published in English in 2012, Dugin's lecture gave me a key to understanding my own academic experience as a political thinker attracted, theoretically, to certain aspects of contra-liberal conservative thought. I had noticed the common phenomenon that the term "fascist" was often employed to delegitimize forms of political thought that were neither liberal nor left of liberal.<sup>125</sup>

After delving further into Dugin's work, Millerman claims,

I began to wonder whether there was an opportunity not only to think from "the fourth political theory" and thus avoid being thoughtlessly dismissed as "fascistic," but also to take "fascism" more seriously as a political theory than it had been presented from within the framework of the prevalent first and second political theories.

Indeed, as Millerman indicates, the work of far-right philosophers like Dugin and Heidegger is certainly fuelling young far-right academics to use that work to legitimate their own ideologies. As political scientist Ronald Beiner argues in his recent book outlining the ways far-right intellectuals have been returning to the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger,

Richard Spencer and Alexander Dugin, scary as they are, are not unique cases. They are part of a new Fascist International that is becoming more and more assertive. As incredible as it may seem, the alt-right even managed to establish a beachhead in the Trump White House [referring to Steve Bannon].<sup>126</sup>

Millerman, and Dugin alike, is drawing from a tradition that seeks to create the liberal-democratic world that emerged out of the French and American Revolutions.

### **Generation Identity: A Millennial Fascism for the Future**

While many elements of the extreme far right were suppressed after the Second World War, neo-fascists, white nationalists, far-right traditionalists and other similar groups have re-emerged in the last decade. One prominent group is Génération Identitaire—a trans-European,

networked group of primarily young people who advocate for a ‘Europe of Nations’.<sup>127</sup> Birthed out of a contingent of the European New Right inspired ‘Identitarian Bloc’, since their introduction in France in 2012, *Génération Identitaire* has quickly acquired their own autonomy separate from the Bloc and have expanded their reach precipitously, with new chapters appearing at an alarming rate. The success of this movement has occurred in large part because of the ease for like-minded individuals to connect to each other vis-à-vis the internet, forming ‘digital imagined communities’.

However, there is no Generation Identity umbrella organisation. Each locality creates its own variation, operating in a way that is similar to movements such as the 15-M movement in Spain (spring 2011), Occupy Wall Street (autumn 2011) and Black Lives Matter (summer 2013) in the United States—holding a common banner, but operating with local autonomy. Not only has Generation Identity borrowed organising strategies from the left, but they have also appropriated and used consumerist and capitalistic ideologies to promote their white supremacist beliefs—even selling Identitarian food, clothing, beer and books.<sup>128,129</sup> Targeting primarily young people, they hold camps, organise lectures, host militant training exercises in which participants all dress alike and even teach classes on marketing and graphic design for the purposes of outreach and to promote a Europe free of Islam.<sup>130</sup>

The British strain of Generation Identity, which curiously includes Ireland, has even made references to the Spanish Reconquista, which culminated with the Catholic Kings, Isabel and Fernando, expelling Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula beginning in 1492, instituting strict religious rules that excised native-born Jewish and Muslim Iberians from the new Spanish state. Both Islam and Judaism had histories going back more than seven centuries. The group argues on their website:

The term Reconquista (“reconquest”) is based on the historical event of the gradual recapture of the Iberian Peninsula, which had been held by Muslim conquerors, by the successors of the Visigothic kingdoms. It’s true that today we are not facing an immediate military confrontation but the threat instead is one of self-destruction through a multicultural zeitgeist. Our fight is therefore a war of words, ideas and politics.

We, the Generation Identity, want to reconquer social spaces of discourse, which have been dominated by a left-wing hegemony. We are a loud patriotic voice that shows its face, one that is creating new pathways for the values of tradition and national pride. Love for our own and an awareness of our ethno-cultural identity are matters we take for granted and of which we should not feel ashamed. We want patriotism to become an important value for society.

We also value true freedom of expression so that these important issues will have a place in the public discourse. These are our demands and for this cause we go on the streets every day to form a phalanx for the Reconquista.<sup>131</sup>

The use of the terms ‘Reconquista’ and ‘phalanx’ is not insignificant, as they explicitly recall both the Spanish expulsion of Muslims and Jews during the early modern period and the fascist régime of Francisco Franco, whose ‘Falange’, Spanish for ‘Phalanx’, a fascist party founded in 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, ruled Spain during the authoritarian dictatorship that lasted from 1939 to 1975. Moreover, such rhetoric also reiterates the foundational myth propagated by the Francoist régime that the Kingdom of Spain depended upon a cleansing of Spain from more than 700 years of Muslim and Jewish heritage. By recalling the Reconquista and the Falange, the group demonstrates a fear of pluralism, advocating for homogeneity of ideas, cultural practices and ethnicity—squarely a fascist tendency.



*Figure 16.2* Identity Evropa, the US-based branch of the Generation Identity movement, waves its flags next to confederate flags at the white nationalist ‘Unite the Right’ rally organised by Richard Spencer in Charlottesville, Virginia on 12 August 2017. White supremacist James Alex Fields was found guilty of killing counter-protester Heather Heyer with an automobile at the rally. Kim Kelley-Wagner/Shutterstock.com.

Curiously, Generation Identity members often reject the label of ‘nationalist’,<sup>132</sup> but still show a marked form of xenophobia towards immigrants and antipathy towards the European Union. One speculates that because the term ‘nationalist’ has become so loaded because of the legacy of Nazism in Europe this legacy might serve as a rationale for young people to reject the term. Nevertheless, actions do often speak louder than words. In the spring of 2017, one arm of the Generation Identity movement started a campaign called ‘Defend Europe’ to fund-raise so that to acquire a ship to sail the Mediterranean, near Libya, with the purpose of picking up refugees escaping from Libya and returning them to that country—hoping to find Libyans before governmental and non-governmental organisations patrolling those waters would have the chance to rescue the seafarers who gamble their lives on the open sea. Effectively, Defend Europe sought to circumvent the arrival of these refugees to European shores. In an attempt to block the Defend Europe campaign, the internet payment service company, PayPal, recently froze the organisations’ ability to accept funds—a tactic which has proven effective at slowing down the movement but has not entirely halted it. As of late summer, 2017, some 3,095 people had contributed \$228,656 to the group’s crowdsourced fundraiser.<sup>133,134,135,136</sup> To be sure, while the label of ‘nationalist’ might be rejected, these anti-immigrant actions certainly reflect a form of xenophobia and nationalism.

Arktos Media has served as one of the primary publishers and translators for Generation Identity. Although *Génération Identitaire* already has a considerable following online, nearly 20,000 at the end of the summer of 2017,<sup>137</sup> Arktos has played an important role for the movement, funding the publication of short, accessible, aesthetically pleasing volumes that have helped to make Identitarian ideologies more appealing and understandable to white European audiences looking for a scapegoat—whether the older generations (the so called ‘May ’68ers’) or immigrants.

Generation Identity heavily relies on aesthetics and branding to appeal to its audience—a fascistic tradition, indeed. Although they are composed of loosely organised regional chapters/cells, they typically identify themselves as part of the movement through the use of a Greek-inspired, encircled ‘lambda’ symbol, often set in black, with a bright yellow background for contrast. On their website, the Identitarians employ sleek black and white videos featuring young, trendy white people who have been aggrieved by immigrants and people of colour—afraid to walk the streets, denied jobs.<sup>138</sup> The demand for the Generation Identity literature has been popular enough for Arktos to publish three volumes dedicated to the movement. The first volume, *We are... Generation Identity*, was published in 2013 by an anonymous author. The next two volumes, *Generation Identity: A Declaration of War Against the ’68ers* and *A Europe of Nations*, were written by Markus Willinger (b. 1992). Willinger writes on behalf of all young people in a tone of

indignation to his parents' generation, 'We go to class with 80% or more foreign-born students. Knife-mad Turks, drug-dealing Africans, and fanatical Muslims'.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, the alterophobia is blatant and pronounced. In *A Europe of Nations*, Willinger argues:

A person's cultural identity is nearly unchangeable. Every person is moulded in early childhood, and this process can only occur again in absolutely exceptional cases...Under such circumstances, how should millions of people from the Global East suddenly become Europeans? They can't... Our continent and our culture can't survive if millions of non-Europeans live here. We can't preserve our identity under these conditions... Europe and the Muslim world have always been diametrically opposed.<sup>140</sup>

Arktos has also published a short volume by Alexander Dugin, *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism*, aesthetically designed to appeal to readers of the Generation Identity books, mimicking black and yellow colour schema and short form of the Generation Identity books. Arktos has used other ploys to gain new readership. They have implemented tactics that have incentivised the selling of their books in bulk, offering a 35% discount to anyone who were to buy five or more Arktos titles to sell to friends, family and coworkers.<sup>141</sup> Additional incentives in the form of discounts were also offered for recruiting new customers.<sup>142</sup>

As is well established in the popular press, because of the internet, individuals and fringe radical right-wing groups that otherwise would have likely found themselves marginalised have been able to construct a virulent social network to connect their fascistic ideologies.<sup>143</sup> 'Greetings, you proud sons of Rome', often starts 'The Golden One' in his immensely popular right-wing YouTube channel. The Golden One is the pseudonym of Marcus Follin, a Swedish far-right nationalist, twenty-something who produces a continual flow of videos that are posted to YouTube. In his videos, the long, flaxen-haired bodybuilder is often seen flexing his muscles, often shirtless, decrying immigrants, cultural Marxism, globalists, multiculturalism and most infamously 'beta-leftists'. His videos also include a strange sort of mix of workout tips, video game walkthroughs where he plays historical figures and gives his own variations of history. He talks about his family, masculinity and the need to protect one's 'clan'. With a reach that seemingly dwarfs that of Arktos, The Golden One, as of late summer 2017, had 7,780,923 views on YouTube, 60,539 YouTube subscribers and 20,486 fans on Facebook.<sup>144,145</sup> By the beginning of 1 September 2018, the channel, describing itself as 'dedicated to how glorious and magnificent I am' had risen to 10,218,647 views on YouTube, 82,617 YouTube subscribers and 22,998 followers on Facebook.<sup>146,147</sup> In effect, he acts as a translator of these texts for a broader audience. A self-proclaimed 'alpha', Follin considers



himself an Identitarian. His aesthetic resembles a nineteenth-century romanticised idea of the past that conflates Nordic lore, ancient Rome and an ad hoc mixture of ‘barbarism’, and Renaissance festival reenactment. He frequently stops to admire his musculature, flexes his pectoral muscles spasmodically and poses awkwardly at the camera. The Swede even appeared in a podcast hosted by former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke in the autumn of 2016.<sup>148</sup> An avid fan of Arktos, Follin sometimes contributes to various Motpol-related websites, and often reviews and discusses Arktos books for his fans in his videos.

In Follin’s review of *Generation Identity: A Declaration of War against the ‘68ers* he claims:

This is a perfect book to understand the political landscape of Europe right now. Now, there are differences in the different European nations, but in the whole Western world, a lot of things are very similar. So, Markus Willinger writes like a manifesto, a declaration of war against the 68ers. And the 68ers are basically what I call ‘beta leftists’. People who revere everything that’s unnatural, sick, unhealthy, unglorious, untraditional [sic].<sup>149</sup>

In what enters into the realm of a stream-of-consciousness rant, the Golden One decries proponents of the ‘multicultural-hell project’, intellectuals and academics of the 1960s, the media and Jews as people who have wanted to ‘destroy Europe’—except for ‘regular Jews’ who are in danger because of Muslim immigrants coming to Europe.<sup>150</sup> This hesitance, to delineate Jews who want to destroy Europe, and ‘regular Jews’, potentially marks a hesitancy, or at least a recognition of what most would read as anti-Semitism.

Like many Identitarian projects, Follin has also set up a website in which he sells clothing apparel with double-headed eagles, pseudo medieval crests and shirts emblazoned with ‘Aux Armes’ with a kitschy fleur-de-lis design. The Golden One currently has a Patreon account set-up, of which he has 255 patrons regularly donating some amount of money. On that page, he writes:

Your support enables my continued metapolitical work via YouTube (videos) and my other social media. Any and all financial aid is extremely appreciated. Moreover, I can no longer rely on YouTube ad-revenue which makes your contributions here even more appreciated! I would like to aim a massive and heartfelt thank you to everyone who has aided me financially, you are contributing greatly to my metaphysical work!<sup>151</sup>

While seemingly harmless, Follin is perhaps an example of the real impact of Arktos—the ability to appeal to followers, who, in turn, create

new followers, spreading fascistic ideologies. Moreover, he is not alone as YouTube is littered with other such personalities who imbibe Alt-Right fascistic tendencies, many preparing for cultural war against liberalism, democracy and pluralism.

### **Mixed Digital and Analogue Methods for the Internet Age**

In April 2018, the social media platform, Facebook, suspended many of Richard Spencer associated accounts, including AltRight.com and the National Policy Institute.<sup>152</sup> In May 2018, AltRight.com was removed from the internet by the webhosting company GoDaddy.<sup>153</sup> While the website has since reappeared, its content in the following months was not refreshed. While both the National Policy Institute and AltRight.com have encountered setbacks, Arktos continues strong—perhaps because of the nature of its digital and analogue presence.

On a shoestring budget, using little more than semi-decent graphic design skills, some zombified proto/neo-fascist ideologies, occultism and the internet, Arktos has seemingly carved out a place for themselves in both the digital and physical world. While seemingly vulnerable to in-fighting on occasion, Arktos has also demonstrated that they can be creative when they encounter a roadblock—constructing their own far-right publishing house when they did not have one, producing their own propaganda websites when they could not get the press attention they wanted and building networks of people that not only hold sway, but who are not afraid to join in this so-called war against equality, democracy and pluralism.

After former editor-in-chief Jason Reza Jorjani left, Arktos welcomed new collaborators to the fold, including chief translator and editor Roger Adwan and assistant art director Patrik Ehn, who joined Daniel Friberg, Tor Westman and Charles Lyons as directors. Lyons also was listed as the chief administrative officer. Gregory Lauder-Frost was listed as Head of Arktos UK. Martin Locker, who had been working with Arktos since 2015, assumed the position of assistant editor-in-chief. Editor John Bruce Leonard and Hungarian-American YouTuber Melissa Mészáros joined the regular staff; shortly thereafter, the Italy-based Leonard was promoted to editor-in-chief in February 2018.<sup>154</sup> Of himself, Leonard has said,

Here, then, Reader, is John Bruce Leonard as he would *like* to be: a man of letters, a man of the Muse—whenever she will have me—; a sometime poet, sometime draughtsman; a free spirit on occasion and on occasion a scholar; a dilettante in music and an aesthete by turns; an anti-modernist and enemy of most of what today is toted [*sic*] as “progress”; a lover of the *noble* past, a striver after a nobler *future*—may all this serve to mark me!<sup>155,156</sup>

Like Nazi-Fascists before him, Leonard makes no equivocation as to his desire to push back against modernity and the pluralist world that has emerged out of the Enlightenment.<sup>157</sup>

In early 2018, William Clark, who had been the registrar and North Atlantic regional coordinator for 'Identity Evropa',—the then United States' branch of Generation Identity which used a stylized 'v' in its name as a visual cue to evoke a sort of pseudo-Latinate/European tradition (now rebranded as the American Identity Movement)—was named Head of Arktos US, representing the publisher in the United States. In a newsletter email introducing Clark to Arktos' readers, he was described as having previously helped 'with conference sales in the US'. In the new position, Arktos announced Clark's responsibilities include 'giving speeches on our behalf, as well as organising conference book stalls, marketing initiatives and other activities aimed at improving our market presence in the US'.<sup>158</sup> Prior to this appointment, in September 2017, Clark was spotted hanging posters for both Arktos and Identity Evropa on the campus of Millersville University of Pennsylvania. As seen in a tweet posted by Identity Evropa, some posters found on that campus featured an Islamophobic image of Guillaume Faye's xenophobic book, *Understanding Islam*, which features a skeleton dressed in a burka on the cover. The phrase 'So radical your professors will blush' hung above the cover image—the Arktos logo below.<sup>159,160,161</sup> Clark listed himself as a board member and administrative planner for 'Operation Homeland', a new white supremacist group announced by Richard Spencer in December 2017.<sup>162</sup>

Presumably under the direction of Clark, in June 2018, Arktos initiated a 'Collections' program that allowed for bookshops and individual sellers to purchase Arktos books in bulk at a 50% discount off the cover price vis-à-vis their website. At that time Daniel Friberg was listed as chief executive officer, Tor Westman was chief marketing officer, Charles Lyons was chief administrative officer, John Bruce Leonard was editor-in-chief and Martin Locker was assistant editor-in-chief. The collection was described as such:

Supposing you are a professional bookseller who would like to bulk order a variety of our titles at a discount, or a private retailer looking to spread our literature and to earn money by becoming one of Arktos' Community Retailers; or supposing you need some material to start up a book club or a study group, or would simply like to set off on a personal journey into unexplored territories of the human mind and soul — in all these cases and more, Arktos Collections are your answer.

The Arktos Collections included categories, including: 'Essentials', 'Activist', 'Metapolitical', 'Traditionalist' and 'Fiction'. In addition, Arktos

began podcast and live stream events that featured conversations with authors, hosted by John Bruce Leonard, Charles Lyons and Martin Locker.

These new digital initiatives roughly coincided with the release of Arktos' new anthology dedicated to the Alt-Right, titled: *A Fair Hearing: The Alt-Right in the Words of Its Members and Leaders* (May 2018). This anthology was the product of a much more ambitious project. At the website [www.afairhearing.net](http://www.afairhearing.net), a micro-site, Arktos defined the movement as:

The alt-right is foremost an intellectual movement, but its thinkers are anything but retiring academics. Its members are seldom over 40, often from middle class backgrounds, often college educated, and always on the cutting edge of Internet culture. With their legendary brutal attacks on liberal utopianism, their ability to dominate any social media platforms where they aren't censored, and more recently, their controversial public demonstrations, the alt-right has become the proverbial elephant in the room of American politics.

Are these merely neo-Nazis with updated packaging, or has this movement, as its members believe, tapped into something more profound?<sup>163</sup>

Not only does this description indicate the importance of the internet to the movement, the micro-site, launched 20 November 2017,<sup>164</sup> was used to solicit articles for the volume. The call for submissions described the project as such:

The goal is to compile approximately twenty-five essays, ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 words in length, in which the leading lights of the alt-right, as well as lesser known activists, clear the air regarding what they do and do not think about the issues that define their movement, and our time.

The target audience is white conservatives who are:

- Aware of but not particularly knowledgeable about the alt-right
- Not strongly biased for or against the movement
- Intelligent and literate, but not necessarily erudite

The purpose of the project is to demystify and destigmatize [*sic*] the alt-right for regular Americans. This is meant to be a book that can be shared with potential alt-right allies or converts. The tone should be sincere, and the subject matter, style and language should not require any specialized knowledge.

Ideally, we would like your essay to feel like a personal appeal to a family member who is reasonable and smart, but who has internalized the mainstream narratives regarding the issues that define

the alt-right. In terms of audience/reading level, the material should be appropriate for fans of authors such as Ann Coulter and Mark Steyn.

This book will be released in paperback, ebook and audiobook formats.<sup>165</sup>

The description of the purpose of the book leaves very little room for ambiguity. The target of the Alt-Right is explicitly white conservatives, fans of Ann Coulter and Mark Steyn—regulars on mainstream conservative media channel Fox News and Rush Limbaugh, or, as Arktos would define those potential readers—so-called ‘regular Americans’. To be sure, this definition of ‘regular Americans’ by default considers non-whites as ‘other’. The collection was hastily edited and released in May 2018, with contributions by Richard Spencer, Daniel Friberg, Evan McLaren—of Spencer’s National Policy Institute—, Marcus Follin—the YouTuber known as ‘The Golden One’—, Kevin MacDonald—who the Southern Poverty Law Center has called ‘the neo-Nazi movement’s favorite academic’—,<sup>166</sup> Bre Faucheux—a pseudonym used by podcaster Brittany Nelson—,<sup>167</sup> Gregory Hood—a writer for the far-right website *American Renaissance*—, amongst many others. It is not unimportant that this movement recognises how to both utilise digital and analogue methods to spread its message and to shape their narrative.

As dire as all this sounds, while it might be obvious how influential the internet as a tool has become in helping to promote white-nationalist ideas, and although much has been written about the democratic potentialities of the internet,<sup>168,169</sup> we must remember Melvin Kranzberg’s first law of technology: ‘Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral’.<sup>170</sup> Kranzberg (1917–1995) believed his law ‘should constantly remind us that it is the historian’s duty to compare short-term versus long-term results, the utopian hopes versus the spotted actuality, the what-might-have been against what actually happened, and the trade-offs among various “goods”; and possible “bads”’.<sup>171</sup> The founder of the Society for the History of Technology believed that the outcome of technology depended upon interactions between sociocultural situations and the values of societal institutions.<sup>172</sup>

## Conclusions

For the writers and editors of Arktos, the world we live in is about to break into a new Golden Age that will harken in a traditionalist society that reverses the damage they believe was caused because of the Enlightenment and modernity—ideas of equality, democracy and pluralism. It would be facile to call this Identitarian movement strictly the fascists of old, for they are not. They are, as they claim, to the right of fascism, they are building a new movement, they know how to use aesthetics and

ingenuity to both create a platform and to win converts and they know how to use technology to their advantage. For them, the stakes are high: what they believe to be the genocide of white culture and European identity—which they believe to be inextricable. For them, there is no place for diversity—only homogeneity. They do not want to win this homogeneity by force, though they are preparing for race wars; they want to win minds and new believers—to change paradigms by creating new fascist potentialities and futures through an inbreeding of fascistic ideologies. With their alliance with Richard Spencer in the United States, Arktos seemingly will continue to hold sway and continue to win new followers.

Today's European New Right and Alt-Right are a variety of fascism that sees nationalism as a means, not an end-goal. Mixed with libertarianism, they posit a sort of 'peaceful ethnic cleansing' that works like an 'invisible hand' that will sort people out through ethno-nationalism. For them, their nationalism—Swedish, Austrian, French, American—works to empower them as individuals, a subcategory of white, Western, European culture. Unlike fascism of old, they hardly embrace individualism. Their end-goal is racial purity through the re-assertion of nationalism—a white nationalism. They do not wholly trust nationalism of old; they see it as malleable, something that can be changed by outsiders. Aryan whiteness and an imagined idea of 'Europeanness' are the teleological objective for this latest mutation of fascism. For them, to be European is to be white. They believe that only race, unlike nationalism of old, can remain biologically fixed, and to remain so, and to make their nations great again, they must 'defend Europe' through the promotion of white nationalism. Through their publications online and print they seek to alter the history of Europe, and to promote a version of the past that negates the history of fascism.

## Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this chapter was published as part of a five-part series, "The Rise of the European Far-Right in the Internet Age," published in *EuropeNow: A Journal of Research and Art* (New York: Council for European Studies), February 2018, [www.europenowjournal.org/2018/01/31/the-rise-of-the-european-far-right-in-the-internet-age/](http://www.europenowjournal.org/2018/01/31/the-rise-of-the-european-far-right-in-the-internet-age/).
- 2 Né Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola.
- 3 Teitelbaum, Benjamin R. "White Nationalists Give Up Trying to Be Respectable; Daniel Friberg, a Media-Savvy Swede, Stood there in Charlottesville Alongside the Hooligans." *Wall Street Journal*, 13 August 2017.
- 4 *Right On* Staff, "Right On Staff: Introducing AltRight.com | RightOn.net," *Right On*, 17 January 2017. Archived 18 January 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170118085255/https://www.righthon.net/2017/01/17/introducing-altright-com/>.
- 5 *The Metapolitics of Arktos – Speech by John Morgan @ Identitarian Ideas VII* (2015), perf. John Morgan, *YouTUBE.com*, 20 November 2015, accessed 16 June 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qV2QTJr\\_Hk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qV2QTJr_Hk).

- 6 Charles Lyons, "The Birth of Arktos and Its Role in the Alt-Right," *AltRight.com*, 1 June 2017. Archived 5 June 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170605205918/https://altright.com/2017/05/31/the-birth-of-arktos-and-its-role-in-the-alt-right/>. For more on Identitarianism see José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).
- 7 Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, xi.
- 9 Nathan Leonard, "A Blaze through the Gloom; an Interview with Arktos Media's John Morgan," *Heathen Harvest*, 7 July 2014, accessed 7 August 2017, <https://heathenharvest.org/2014/07/07/a-blaze-through-the-gloom-an-interview-with-arktos-medias-john-maorgan>.
- 10 For the European New Right, and the American Alt-Right, 'cultural Marxism' is meant as a derogatory turn of phrase used to describe the interdisciplinary and intersectional academic methodological framework commonly known as 'critical theory', which draws on influences from the likes of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who popularised the concept of 'Hegemony' in his *Prison Notebooks*. Included in the New Right's definition of 'cultural Marxism' one might also find authors prominent in what was the Frankfurt School, originated at the Institute for Social Research at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany, which sought to understand issues of class in relation to ethnocentrism, nationalism and race. Later scholars have augmented issues of gender, sexuality, bodies—expanding critical theory to understand more complicated systems of oppression.
- 11 Some of these tendencies include: an attempt to impose an idea of purity or homogeneity onto others, an idealised and utopian future based on a romanticised, imagined past, and a use of binary and absolutist categorisation that promotes nationalism, ethnocentrism, anti-intellectualism, racism, misogyny, queerphobia, ableism, classism and anti-liberalism. Tactically, fascism is appropriative of other movements, uses ritual and mystical symbolism and relies upon false information, propaganda. Adamantly against individualism, fascism advocates for militarism, violence, surveillance and expansion of an authoritarian state's powers. In its more extreme instances, it holds colonialist ambitions, desires a nation-centric economy and relies on forced labour and genocide for the supposed purpose of returning a fatherland, or country, to greatness. See Louie Dean Valencia-García, *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain: Clashing with Fascism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 40–1.
- 12 I use what I call 'digital archival excavation' to situate the recent history of the publisher and its relationship with the rise of the European far-right/alt-right through the use of the Internet Archive ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) and by scouring webpages and sites that are preserved or abandoned in the recesses of the internet. I define digital excavation as a methodological process that uses websites, such as the Internet Archive, which attempt to 'capture' websites. The Internet Archive does not always capture all the pages of a given website, but do often take multiple captures of a given page, which facilitates user's ability to see changes made to a given page over time. In addition, other sources include photographs and text from Arktos collaborator's personal websites, editorial pieces, social media and videos posted to the website, YouTube.com, from their conferences and interviews.
- 13 In my footnotes, when citing from the Internet Archive, I will not note when I "accessed" the website, but instead will indicate when the archive's

web crawler archived the page, as that will more accurately reflect the information and context of the digital document. To this point, when a scholar visits an archive they do not cite the date that they viewed the document, unless for some particularly significant reason. Instead, they cite the date of record for the document. Using the Internet Archive, scholars can often see both the date of publication of an article (if indicated) and the date of capture—which do not always align. In my citations, when referring to the Internet Archive, I will indicate the date the webcrawler ‘archived’ the page. In cases when I am citing a website that is not archived by the Internet Archive, I have marked my date of access, and have saved a copy of the site as it appeared when I visited it in my own records.

- 14 The company was registered in Århus, Denmark by Christiansen and Boch on 1 November 2005 and was closed on 31 December 2009. “Integral Tradition Publishing I/S V/Jacob Christiansen Og Patrick Boch,” <https://data.virk.dk/>, accessed 11 August 2017, [https://datacvr.virk.dk/data/visenhed?enheds\\_type=virksomhed&id=29051895&soeg=29051895&language=en-gb](https://datacvr.virk.dk/data/visenhed?enheds_type=virksomhed&id=29051895&soeg=29051895&language=en-gb).
- 15 At first, only Senholt and Boch were listed on the ITP website’s “About” page. Others, such as John Morgan, also have claimed to be co-founders as well, though there does not seem to be an indication of that either on the website of documents filed. See “About Us,” *Integral Tradition Publishing*, archived 15 March 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070315013345/http://www.integraltradition.com:80/catalog/about.php>.
- 16 Counting began on 19 August 2006. The number was likely larger. *Integral Tradition Publishing*, “Welcome,” archived 27 December 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20071227175659/http://www.integraltradition.com:80/catalog/index.php>.
- 17 This traditionalist school can be thought of as a variant of the *Nouvelle Droite*, or European New Right, which came into being in the 1960s under the direction of right-wing philosopher Alain de Benoist and his GRECE, which took cues from proto-fascist, esoteric/traditionalist philosopher Julius Evola.
- 18 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 53.
- 19 For more on 4chan, Reddit and Tumblr, see Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-Right and Trump* (Winchester, UK; Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2017). While these websites have garnered a fair amount of attention, the focus of this essay is not those well-known sites.
- 20 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).
- 21 I use ‘ITP’ to describe the earlier years of the press, ‘Arktos’ when specifically discussing the post-ITP years, and ‘ITP/Arktos’ when discussing a broader scope that includes both projects.
- 22 Jacob Christiansen Senholt, “Radical Politics and Political Esotericism: The Adaptation of Esoteric Discourse within the Radical Right,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, ed. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Acumen Publishing, 2012), 248.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 256.
- 24 “About Us,” *Integral Tradition Publishing*. Archived 15 March 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070315013345/http://www.integraltradition.com:80/catalog/about.php>.
- 25 Today, one of the most prominent proponents of traditionalism globally, and an early influence on ITP, Alexander Dugin (b. 1962) has called for “neo-Eurasianism,” a nationalism that is thought of better suited for Russia, one that could include the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and



- even the Islamic world. For more background on Dugin's philosophy, see Chapter 7 of this volume, and Mark J. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 221–40. For more on Dugin, see Sullivan and Fisher-Smith's chapter in this volume.
- 26 At the turn of the twentieth century, the swastika itself was described as a religious symbol that typically meant 'good luck', and is found in Hinduism and Buddhism, amongst other world religions. Famously, Heinrich Schliemann discovered its use in the ancient site of Troy, and considered it a lost religious symbol in Europe. See Thomas Wilson, *The Swastika: The Earliest Known Symbol, and Its Migration; with Observations on the Migration of Certain Industries in Prehistoric Times* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1896), 771. Many German national movements concerned with völkisch traditions appropriated the swastika, and tied it to Aryanism. For more on how occultism influenced early Nazism, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 2004). Moreover, we might consider the ancient function use of the meander or swastika as a 'phatic' character, particularly on buildings or material objects. While by the turn of the century the swastika certainly became a symbol for luck, it is possible that its origins might have been more functional than symbolic. In *How Ancient Europeans Saw the World*, Peter S. Wells, borrowing from Paul Virilio, uses the term to describe images 'whose primary purpose is to attract attention—to force the viewer to look—rather than to convey information...The viewer is spellbound by the appearance of something and loses his or her ability to turn away' (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012, 31–2).
  - 27 For more on National-Catholicism, see chapter two of my upcoming book *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain: Clashing with Fascism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).
  - 28 J. Lester Feder, "This Is How Steve Bannon Sees the Entire World," *BuzzFeed*, 15 November 2016. Archived 17 November 2016. [https://web.archive.org/web/20161117025150/https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/this-is-how-steve-bannon-sees-the-entire-world?utm\\_term=.hu7gJKGIW#.fmpeLRbnA](https://web.archive.org/web/20161117025150/https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/this-is-how-steve-bannon-sees-the-entire-world?utm_term=.hu7gJKGIW#.fmpeLRbnA).
  - 29 Indeed, the connection between the Alt-Right and white nationalism has become so established that in November 2016 the Associated Press advised journalists: '[W]henever "alt-right" is used in a story, be sure to include a definition: "an offshoot of conservatism mixing racism, white nationalism and populism," or, more simply, "a white nationalist movement"'. See John Daniszewski, "Writing about the 'Alt-Right'," 18 November 2016. Archived 28 November 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20161128203006/https://blog.ap.org/behind-the-news/writing-about-the-alt-right>.
  - 30 "Arktos," *Facebook.com*, accessed 11 August 2017, [www.facebook.com/Arktos/](http://www.facebook.com/Arktos/).
  - 31 "Verso Books," *Facebook.com*, accessed 11 August 2017, [www.facebook.com/VersoBks/](http://www.facebook.com/VersoBks/).
  - 32 "ARKTOS," *About ARKTOS*, archived 18 June 2010. <http://web.archive.org/web/20100618042727/http://www.arktos.com/about/about-arktos.html>.
  - 33 Vedism, a type of ancient Hinduism, was written in Sanskrit, and was an Indo-Aryan religion finding its origins in what is today northern India. Esoterism can best be understood as a variation of occultism, promoting European paganism, pre-Vatican II Catholicism, pre-Islamic pagan religion in what is today Iran.

- 34 “Jacob Christiansen Senholt,” Jacob Christiansen Senholt | Aarhus University – Academia.edu, archived 12 August 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170812145452/https://au.academia.edu/JacobSenholt>.
- 35 Jacob Christiansen Senholt, “About Me,” *Jacob Christiansen Senholt*, archived 12 August 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20141215155405/http://jacobsenholt.dk/about-jacob-christiansen-senholt/>.
- 36 Senholt has claimed affiliation with both Konservative Studenter and Liberal Alliance. Liberal Alliance demonstrates libertarian tendencies; in 2014, their website proclaimed a desire for smaller governmental involvement and lower taxes—a maximum of 40% tax rate “Liberal Alliance,” *LiberalAlliance.dk*, archived 16 December 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20141216185613/https://www.liberalalliance.dk/>.
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*Figure 17.1* Crowd waves Canadian queer pride flags while watching floats at Toronto Pride Parade on 3 July 2016. Shawn Goldberg/Shutterstock.com.

# 17 Transforming the Law

## Canada's Bill C-16, Gender and Post-Truth Politics

*Tyler Stacy*

With the advent of Canada's Bill C-16, controversy surrounding the extension of equal rights to trans people rose to public prominence alongside the swarm of media attention garnered by the Alt-Right. While amassing a modest following on YouTube with videos discussing the backwardness of 'political correctness' and the evil of Marxism, Jordan Peterson, a professor at the University of Toronto, declared the bill to be an insidious piece of legislature designed to damage 'Western' culture. As mass media outlets gave Peterson a platform, Peterson's claims about the bill shifted the frame of conservative talking points regarding trans rights: no longer was the debate centred around a hypothetical sexual assaulter in women's bathrooms, but instead discussion focused on Peterson's outlandish claim that the bill would have the effect of penalising anyone who misgendered an individual through incorrect usage of pronouns. Despite droves of legal scholars and individuals with legal backgrounds explaining that Peterson's claims lacked any basis in reality, media continued to give Peterson a platform and conservative politicians, recognising Peterson's traction, towed the line.

This chapter seeks to uncover the post-truth politics surrounding trans rights by focusing specifically on the events and discussions surrounding Bill C-16. I will provide background on Jordan Peterson and his relation to Bill C-16, and then take a closer look at the reality of Bill C-16. I will then review the history of gender in Anglo-Saxon law. Although Peterson may not intentionally align himself with the Alt-Right, his politics place him adjacent and often times parallel to Alt-Right lines of thought. In reviewing the imagined reality of Bill C-16, and the grip it exercised on the wider public, especially in light of the storied history of gender in Anglo-Saxon law, it is clear that opposition to the extension of trans rights exists as justified only in these imagined realities; in reality, trans rights are gravely important to trans individuals and do not pose any physical danger to others or abstract danger to conceptions of free speech and liberty—that in fact, and quite obviously, the extension of trans rights is necessary to protect those individuals who are themselves at risk of both such physical and abstract dangers.

## Jordan Peterson and Bill C-16

Jordan Peterson is a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Toronto who grew immensely in popularity following his objections to Bill C-16. Taking to the streaming video platform, YouTube, Peterson released ‘Professor against Political Correctness, Part I’ in 2016, where he criticises political correctness and Bill C-16.<sup>1</sup> He states that the bill would result in pronoun misuse constituting a hate crime, and that the video itself, because of his ‘commentary on these definitions’, would be possibly ‘illegal and potentially classifiable as hate speech’.<sup>2</sup> He calls the bill ‘nonsensical’, stating that ‘the formulation is absurd’ and ‘has no scientific standing’, and that it ‘is ideologically motivated’.<sup>3</sup> He argues that the ‘gender neutral pronouns are politically motivated’ and ‘connected to an entire underground apparatus of political motivations: radical left political motivations’, and that to abide by this law is to be ‘the mouthpiece of some murderous ideology’.<sup>4</sup> A month later, he doubled-down in an interview, stating: ‘These laws are the first laws that I’ve seen that require people under the threat of legal punishment to employ certain words, to speak a certain way, instead of merely limiting what they’re allowed to say’.<sup>5</sup> Peterson also continued his alarmism in an article for *The Hill*:

Bill C-16, and its legislative sisters, are particularly insidious constructions .... There is ... a crucial difference between laws that stop people from saying arguably dangerous words and laws that mandate the use of politically-approved words and phrases. We have never had laws of the latter sort before, not in our countries. This is no time to start.<sup>6</sup>

With Peterson’s sky-rocketing popularity—his message denouncing political correctness meshing seamlessly with the ideologies of an emerging Alt-Right—a debate held at the University of Toronto provided him yet another platform, and subsequent media coverage further validated his position. Thus, despite the fact that Peterson’s fears of Bill C-16 were without any legal basis, his popularity and validation of authority by media outlets shifted the discourse surrounding the bill—supporters of Bill C-16 now had to engage with an argument without merit.

Peterson cites ‘postmodern neo-Marxists’, often simply calling them ‘postmodernists’, as producers of C-16 and as a scourge on Western civilisation. According to Peterson, postmodern neo-Marxists are postmodernists who have aligned themselves with Marxism; they are evil not only because believing in Marxism is incompatible with being moral, but also because Marxism is affirmatively evil and deceptive, as revealed by twentieth-century history.<sup>7</sup> He believes the social sciences and the humanities are corrupted by postmodern neo-Marxists who reject the ‘western Judeo-Christian tradition’ and want to destroy Western

civilisation.<sup>8</sup> In an interview with *The Epoch Times*, Peterson goes on to argue that Marxism is a doctrine worse than national-socialism, because the magnitude of havoc it spurred exceeded that wreaked by Hitler.<sup>9</sup> Peterson states that, currently, the postmodern neo-Marxists ‘have control over governmental institutions; they have infiltrated bureaucratic organizations at the mid to upper level and are trained by their professors at the universities’.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, Peterson’s concerns and urgency seem, at least, well-intentioned.

Peterson’s insistence on the existence of postmodern neo-Marxism is hardly novel, however, and his idea is littered with historical inaccuracies, inconsistencies and fundamental misunderstandings of philosophy. As Tabatha Southey points out, Peterson’s concept should seem familiar, particularly because it is an idea nearly indistinguishable from ‘Cultural Marxism:’

Cultural Marxism’ is a conspiracy theory holding that an international cabal of Marxist academics, realizing that traditional Marxism is unlikely to triumph any time soon, is out to destroy Western civilization by undermining its cultural values. ‘Postmodern neo-Marxism’, on the other hand, is a conspiracy theory holding that an international cabal of Marxist academics, realizing that traditional Marxism is unlikely to triumph any time soon, is out to destroy Western civilization by undermining its cultural values with ‘cultural’ taken out of the name so it doesn’t sound quite so similar to the literal Nazi conspiracy theory of ‘cultural Bolshevism.’<sup>11</sup>

With Marxism as an example of modernist philosophy, and thus subject to the postmodern ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ that Jean-François Lyotard describes, postmodern neo-Marxism appears oxymoronic.<sup>12</sup> In *12 Rules for Life*, Peterson cites neither Derrida nor Foucault, instead only ever citing *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* in reference to postmodernism.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the picture Peterson paints of postmodernists in lock-step with Marxism, Lyotard explicitly disavowed Marxism, Foucault left a Stalinist communist party—removing Marxist content from later editions of *Mental Illness and Psychology* before attempting to stop its publication entirely—and Derrida ‘d[id] not call for a return to the communist project [but] instead s[aw] Marx as a ghostly presence within liberal democracy, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the so-called “end of history”’.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, with regard to Derrida,

*Specters of Marx* is unequivocally loathed by Marxists of a certain persuasion [and] those who found something of value in Derrida’s reading were surprised by it at the time, given the prevailing opposition between Marxist and deconstructionist camps in the academy.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, postmodern political alignment spans from leftists like Foucault to conservatives like Peter Blum. Thus, Peterson's idea of postmodern neo-Marxism appears as a reconfigured cultural Bolshevism, and it reveals his misunderstanding of both postmodern and Marxist thought while shedding some light on his paranoia surrounding Bill C-16.

### **Bill C-16: The History and Legal Reality**

Bill C-16 was designed to protect trans legal rights in Canada. To accomplish this, it added 'gender identity or expression' to the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA).<sup>16</sup> In doing so, the rights of trans individuals are brought within other protected classes: banks and landlords, for example, are prevented from gender identity and gender expression discrimination similar to how they are prevented from racial or sexual discrimination. This amendment is not particularly revolutionary; in fact, '[t]he federal government was late to this game—most of the provinces and territories had already included gender identity and gender expression in their provincial human rights code'.<sup>17</sup> After a decade-long battle for trans rights by various members of parliament, the government-sponsored Bill C-16 emerged, based off of similar bills previously introduced by private members.<sup>18</sup>

Bill C-16 set its sights on two bodies of law: the CHRA and the Criminal Code. With regard to the CHRA, the bill added 'gender identity and gender expression' to section 2, thus including the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression amongst race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and pardoned/suspended conviction.<sup>19</sup> In addition, C-16 added 'gender identity or expression' to the prohibited grounds of discrimination found in section 3(1), again including it amongst the same terms as found in section 2.<sup>20</sup> In regard to the Criminal Code, Bill C-16 added 'gender identity or expression' as an identifiable group under sections 318 and 319. Other identifiable groups under these sections include 'any section of the public distinguished by colour, race, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, ... or mental or physical disability'.<sup>21</sup> It also added 'gender identity and expression' to section 718.2(a)(i), thus permitting a court's consideration of one's gender identity and/or expression in sentencing for hate crimes; other factors courts may consider include 'race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or any other similar factor'.<sup>22</sup> Simply put, existing law found in the Criminal Code and protections already offered by the CHRA extend to gender identity and expression after Bill C-16—that is it.

While initial objections to Bill C-16 paralleled objections to similar, previous bills, opposition to the bill was re-invented following Peterson's

critiques. Originally, two main strategies were deployed: (1) gaslighting, through an appeal to ‘rigorous principles of good law-making’, the argument was that C-16 could not be plainly understood and that the terms ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender expression’ are vague; and (2) fear-mongering, where trans rights were framed as threatening to women and children and empowering to sexual predators.<sup>23</sup> After Peterson’s rise in popularity, the oppositional discourse shifted to focus primarily on C-16 as a threat to freedom of expression. Peterson’s unfounded concerns were not only echoed by the media outlets that gave him platform but also by politicians, adding to the authority of his claims. Senator Donald Plett, during the bill’s second reading, argued:

Political correctness authoritarians have narrowed the scope of acceptable thought and discourse in academia and, by extension, the general public. However, we as legislators and policy-makers should not be afraid of the difficult conversations. In fact, it is outrageous and irresponsible to do so. Legislation that has serious implications on freedom of speech—and, *for the first time in Canadian law, compelled speech*—cannot be passed so flippantly without thorough public discourse, debate, and consideration.<sup>24</sup>

With Peterson’s post-truth concerns, in turn, seemingly legitimised, those in favour of the bill were now faced with rebutting C-16 as anathema to freedom of expression.

Contrary to the growing narrative, Bill C-16 carried no risk of criminalising the misuse of gender pronouns. The amendment Bill C-16 offers section 718(2)(a)(i) is *not* a new offence—it merely means that, where one commits a murder, assault or some other offense already in the Criminal Code, a harsher sentence may be considered if the crime was motivated by hatred, be it a hatred of the victim’s race, sex or, as Bill C-16 simply adds: gender identity or expression. Bill C-16’s hate speech amendments also do not make it a crime to misuse pronouns. Section 318 criminalises advocating or promoting genocide, section 319(1) criminalises the public incitement of hatred and section 319(2) criminalises the wilful promotion of hatred. With regard to section 318, legal minds have pointed out that ‘the misuse of pronouns is not the legal equivalent of advocating the death and destruction of trans and gender non-binary individuals and is in no way actionable under this provision’.<sup>25</sup> Section 319(1) also has a high threshold that mere misuse of gender pronouns cannot meet; the incitement must be ‘likely to lead to a breach of the peace’, and Canadian case law requires a threat of violence: ‘A breach of the peace contemplates an act or actions which result in actual or threatened harm to someone’.<sup>26</sup> Finally, section 319(2) ‘has been interpreted by the Supreme Court of Canada as only applying to the most extreme forms of speech’—speech that ‘goes far beyond merely discrediting,



humiliating or offending victims'.<sup>27</sup> Thus, none of the amendments offered by Bill C-16 to the Criminal Code carry any consequence of criminalising pronoun misuse alone.

Concerns that flared around Bill C-16's CHRA amendment were likewise unfounded. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) issued a guidance policy for consideration by human rights tribunals—the Policy on Preventing Discrimination Because of Gender Identity and Expression—and included amongst various actions that may indicate gender-based harassment is the refusal to refer to an individual by their 'proper personal pronoun'. With Bill C-16's addition of 'gender identity or expression' to the CHRA, fears swirled about blanket compelled language. However, OHRC responded by stating:

Refusing to refer to a trans person by their chosen name and a personal pronoun that matches their gender identity, or purposely misgendering, will likely be discrimination *when it takes place in a social area covered by the Code, including employment, housing and services like education*.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the OHRC guidance is not a legally binding body of literature, but simply a guideline for considerations. With (1) the removal of hate speech laws from the CHRA in 2013, (2) the Supreme Court of Canada upholding the hate speech laws under the Criminal Code as constitutional, and (3) the fact that Bill C-16 only adds gender identity and expression to the existing prohibited grounds of discrimination in the CHRA, '[a]ll Bill C-16 does is add the protections already contained in Canadian law to include trans and non-binary individuals'.<sup>29</sup> With nothing in the CHRA or Bill C-16 requiring specific pronoun usage, the Supreme Court of Canada may, someday, nevertheless determine that people have the right to be referred to with a specific pronoun, and 'articulate the factors and context in which such pronoun misuse will constitute a violation of the CHRA', whereafter 'tribunals and courts ... will balance this right with the competing right to freedom of expression'—but this would be a future determination by the Supreme Court of Canada; again, nothing in Bill C-16 carries such a legal consequence.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Bill C-16's amendments to the CHRA and the Criminal Code are constitutional, they do not violate an individual's freedom of expression and they do not make pronoun misuse legally actionable.

## Gender in North American Law

The term 'gender identity' originated in 1960s psychiatry to describe a break between one's sex and internal sense of gender. Robert J. Stoller and Ralph R. Greenson coined the term 'gender identity' at a 1963

conference on homosexuality, and in 1964 Stoller described it as ‘the sense of knowing to which sex one belongs ... the awareness “I am male” or “I am a female”’.<sup>31</sup> According to Stoller, one’s gender identity was made up by a combination of physical anatomy, external influences from others and a biological force that ‘seems to provide some of the drive energy for gender identity’ while being ‘hidden from conscious and preconscious awareness’.<sup>32</sup> Greenspan, on the other hand, believed that the desire to break from one’s biological sex was to escape identification as a homosexual.<sup>33</sup> In 1966, under the Gender Identity Program at Johns Hopkins Medical Center, doctors began performing gender confirming surgery; later that year, Harry Benjamin released ‘The Transsexual Phenomenon’, aimed at capturing the concept and experience of trans identity.<sup>34</sup> ‘Gender identity disorder’ emerged in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM); while ‘gender dysphoria’ replaced ‘gender identity disorder’ in the fifth edition, the DSM ‘continued to rely on the language of ‘gender identity’ in its explanatory notes’.<sup>35</sup>

Usage of ‘gender expression’ evolved from the concept of gender roles around the 1970s. Richard Green and John Money first used ‘gender role’ to describe ‘all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of a boy or man, girl or woman, respectively’.<sup>36</sup> In the 1980s, Spencer E. Cahill drew distinction between ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender expression’, arguing that ‘gender identity emerges early in the child’s biography, [but] its expression and stability depends on subsequent interactional experience’.<sup>37</sup> The concept of gender expression surged in the 1990s, with gender theorists such as Judith Butler examining performative dimensions of gender. Butler argued that ‘gender is not a noun’ and ‘gender proves to be performative—that is, *constituting the identity it is purported to be*’, or, stated another way, ‘[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’.<sup>38</sup> Thus, while gender expression, like gender identity, first surfaced in North American psychiatric discourse, its development is less clear, as gender expression was used interchangeably with other terms until it became more popular around the 1990s.

Gender identity and gender expression, as discrete terms, entered North American legal discourse decades after they first gained acceptance in the psychiatric field. Trans people began petitioning governments to change the designated sex on their driver’s licenses in the 1970s, and while gender identity was a fresh concept, law-makers emphasised terminology that focused on surgery, seemingly in an attempt to narrow the scope of legislation.<sup>39</sup> While provinces across Canada passed amendments to allow trans individuals to change their sex markers, the United Kingdom explicitly prohibited alterations of sex designations on their birth certificates following *Corbett v. Corbett*.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile in the

United States, the City of Minneapolis introduced the first express protections for trans people against discrimination, and other cities joined suit.<sup>41</sup> Despite ‘gender identity’ gaining traction, the term did not appear in any of these laws, and would not appear in North American jurisprudence until the 1980s, where it ‘migrated from medical to legal discourse as the direct consequence of psychiatric evidence introduced in a range of different areas of law’.<sup>42</sup> The term emerged in a North American human rights instrument for the first time after the City of San Francisco added ‘gender identity’ to its local anti-discrimination ordinance in 1994.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the 1990s, other local US jurisdictions passed similar amendments, and in the late 1990s, following a report entitled ‘Finding Our Place: Transgender Law Reform Project’, the British Columbia Human Rights Commission called for trans rights and protections against discrimination.<sup>44</sup> In this report, authors used ‘gender identity’ to refer both to one’s internal sense of gender and one’s performance of gender. The term continued to serve as capturing both of these aspects throughout North American jurisprudence; this term’s use made its way into international law in 2007 when it was included in the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Only recently has a distinction been made between ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender expression’, with legislation such as Bill C-16 and the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act leading the way.

North American case law shows that courts are inclined to limit the scope of ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender expression’, preferring a narrower interpretation that should doubly serve to assuage the unfounded fears of their legal abuse. Historically, as has been described, courts and legal bodies have sought to narrowly extend protections to trans individuals, such as by requiring medical surgery. These trends reveal a disposition to make sure that those trans individuals exercising their rights are, in a clear sense, ‘really trans’, or within the scope of the envisioned protections. For example, where a cis man argued that he faced discrimination because of his employer’s ‘clean shaven policy’, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal denied extension of gender expression protections, reasoning that

[t]here is nothing to indicate that bearded men suffer any particular social, economic, political or historical disadvantage in Canadian or Ontario society, absent any connection between the wearing of a beard and matters of religious observance or perhaps some link to a protected ground in the Code other than sex or gender expression.<sup>45</sup>

While the tribunal, in its decision, left open the possibility that ‘gender expression’ protections may, in the future, extend universally—even to cis individuals—the caution exhibited by the tribunal, and the diligence

in examining the factual context of the issue before them, remains in stark contrast to the visions of abuse conjured by Peterson. With courts and legal bodies continuing to wrestle with trans rights, it is important to recognise a long and storied history of violence and discrimination against trans individuals; with over 50 years of conservative applications, cautious courts and moderate progress, the popularisation of fears such as Peterson's appears not only trivial, if not completely unfounded, but also privileged and affirmatively damaging to a vulnerable class of people.

## Conclusion

Despite the extensive work of lawyers and legal scholars, Peterson's narrative nevertheless exerted a vice grip on public discourse surrounding trans rights. No longer were activists tasked with de-bunking the scenario of a hypothetical bathroom assailant; instead, they were forced to show why Peterson's claims were unfounded. Perhaps the reason Peterson's claims were so strong was precisely because they were so unfounded. Along with the fact that legal writing is often difficult to understand to those unfamiliar, that following bills can be tedious to the every person and that reactionary facets of Alt-Right politics were growing in popularity, specifically 'anti-pc' sentiments, Peterson gave some people exactly what they were looking to hear. With his authority as a university professor—disregarding the lack of legal background—media outlets were inclined to give Peterson platform, and Peterson's statements about Bill C-16 slid perfectly into Alt-Right and popular culture. Peterson created a beast that could not be debunked, because it didn't exist—in effect, activists had to disprove not an error or even a series of error, but a crafted fiction based in a wider, stranger conspiracy about higher education and Marxism.

Ultimately, the history of how Anglo-Saxon law has dealt with gender should come as a comfort to conservatives. The law's treatment of gender has emerged out of and continues to be at the behest of current science. Courts have shown great caution in carrying out the letter of the law in regard to trans individuals and gender legislation. Furthermore, legislation regarding gender has shown a continued narrow history—that the rights afforded to trans people by emerging law is not the extension of new rights, but to provide an instrument through which trans people can exert their rights and protections as equal to others. Although it may be tempting to call trans legislation benign for the sake of assuaging fears, such a statement carries immense privilege, because while trans legislation does not have negative effects for cis-gendered individuals, it does have immense positive effects for trans individuals—it is in no way simply benign for them, but in fact necessary and powerful.

## Notes

- 1 Jordan Peterson, *Professor against political correctness, Part I*, YOUTUBE (Sep. 27, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvPgig201w0>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Antontella Artuso, *U of T prof told to use gender pronouns students want*, TORONTO SUN (Oct. 19, 2016), <https://web.archive.org/web/20181221092547/https://torontosun.com/2016/10/19/u-of-t-tells-outspoken-prof-to-stop-making-public-statements/wcm/4f463c2a-5a72-45ac-9e28-3dfc853cc1fd>.
- 6 Jordan B. Peterson, *Canadian gender-neutral pronoun bill is a warning for Americans*, THE HILL (Oct. 18, 2016), <https://web.archive.org/web/20190128041128/https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/civil-rights/301661-this-canadian-prof-defied-sjw-on-gender-pronouns-and-has-a>.
- 7 Jordan B. Peterson, *Postmodern NeoMarxism: Diagnosis and cure*, YOUTUBE (June 28, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4c-jOdPTN8> ('We already know what the Marxist doctrines have done for oppressed peoples all around the world, and the answer to that mostly was imprison them, enslave them, work them to death or execute them. And as far as I can tell that's not precisely compensurate [sic] with any message of compassion. So I don't think the post-modern neo-marxists have a leg to stand on ethically, intellectually, or emotionally').
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Jordan B. Peterson, *Postmodernism and cultural Marxism*, YOUTUBE (July 6, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLoG9zBvvLQ>.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Tabatha Southey, *Is Jordan Peterson the stupid man's smart person?*, MACLEAN'S (Nov. 17, 2017), <https://web.archive.org/web/20171201041429/http://www.macleans.ca/opinion/is-jordan-peterson-the-stupid-mans-smart-person/>.
- 12 Without getting too deep into a debate over semantics and Peterson's usage of terms, neo-Marxism grew out of and is narrowly traced to the Frankfurt School. Jürgen Habermas, among other critical theorists from the Frankfurt School, was a major critic of postmodernism as well as polemicists against Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and Benhabib. While critical theory shares some traits with postmodernism in critiques of traditional philosophy and social theory, there are major differences between the two that make them largely antagonistic (e.g. 'postmodern theorists ... generally reject rationalism, the lust for categorical distinctions and systematization, and the global takes on history and society that are associated with Habermas'). STEVEN BEST AND DOUGLAS KELLNER, *CRITICAL THEORY: POSTMODERN INTERROGATORIES*, at 215–6 (1991). Nonetheless, Peterson's usage of 'postmodern neo-Marxism' amounts to little more than assertion that postmodernists are actually covert Marxists. He explicitly states, many times, that postmodernists are secretly Marxists, and that their donning of 'postmodernism' is nothing more than 'a sleight of hand' to escape the consequences of being labelled a Marxist. Peterson, *supra* note 9.
- 13 Shuja Haider, *Postmodernism did not take place: On Jordan Peterson's 12 rules for life*, VIEWPOINT MAGAZINE (Jan. 23, 2018), <https://web.archive.org/web/20190103192817/https://www.viewpointmag.com/2018/01/23/postmodernism-not-take-place-jordan-petersons-12-rules-life/> ('Armed with this dubious secondary source, Peterson is left making statements that are

- not only mired in factual error, but espouses a comically reductive conception of how social life and history work. He takes a common misunderstanding at face value, proceeding to build a whole outlook on it'.).
- 14 Ibid. Peterson's belief that Derrida is a secret Marxist appears to stem from this misunderstanding of *Specters of Marx*.
  - 15 Ibid.
  - 16 Brenda Cossman, *Gender identity, gender pronouns, and freedom of expression: Bill C-16 and the traction of specious legal claims*, 68 UNIV. OF TORONTO L.J. 37, 38 (2018).
  - 17 Ibid. at 39.
  - 18 See, e.g., Bill C-389, An Act to Amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code (Gender Identity and Gender Expression), 2nd Sess., 40th Parl. (2009) (This bill was first introduced by MP Bill Siksay in the House of Commons in 2005, before being introduced again in 2009 and last introduced in the 40th Parliament, 3rd Session, which ended in March 2011); see, e.g., Bill C-279, An Act to Amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code (Gender Identity), 2nd Sess., 41st Parl. (2015).
  - 19 *Canadian Human Rights Act*, R.S.C., 1985, c.H-6 s.2.
  - 20 *Canadian Human Rights Act*, R.S.C., 1985, c.H-6 s.3(1).
  - 21 *Criminal Code*, R.S.C. 1985, c.46 s.318(4).
  - 22 *Criminal Code*, R.S.C. 1985, c.46 s.718.2(a)(i).
  - 23 ALLYSON M. LUNNY, DEBATING HATE CRIME: LANGUAGE, LEGISLATURES, AND THE LAW IN CANADA, 106 (2017); Cossman, *supra* note 16, at 57–8.
  - 24 Emphasis mine. See Canada. Parliament. Senate. Debates, 42nd Parl., 1st sess., November 22, 2016: 1762. Archived August 1 2018. [https://web.archive.org/web/20180801194834/https://sencanada.ca/Content/SEN/Chamber/421/Debates/pdf/074db\\_2016-11-22-e.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20180801194834/https://sencanada.ca/Content/SEN/Chamber/421/Debates/pdf/074db_2016-11-22-e.pdf).
  - 25 Cossman, *supra* note 16, at 47.
  - 26 *Criminal Code*, R.S.C. 1985, c.46 s.319(1); *Brown v. Durham Regional Police Force* (1998), 43 O.R. (3d) 223 (Ont. CA); Cossman, *supra* note 16, at 47.
  - 27 Cossman, *supra* note 16, at 48; *Saskatchewan (Human Rights Commission) v. Whatcott*, 2013 SCC 11, [2013] 1 S.C.R. 467.
  - 28 Ontario Human Rights Commission, *Questions and answers about gender identity and pronouns*, OHRC, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181017002530/http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/questions-and-answers-about-gender-identity-and-pronouns> (last visited Oct. 10, 2018).
  - 29 Cossman, *supra* note 16, at 56.
  - 30 Ibid. at 55–6.
  - 31 Robert J. Stoller, *A Contribution to the study of gender identity*, 45 INT'L J. PSYCHO-ANALYSIS 220, 220 (1964).
  - 32 Ibid.
  - 33 Ralph R. Greenson, *On homosexuality and gender identity*, 45 INT'L J. PSYCHO-ANALYSIS 117, 219 (1964).
  - 34 JOANNE MEYEROWITZ, HOW SEX CHANGED: A HISTORY OF TRANSSEXUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES, 219 (2002); Kyle Kirkup, *The origins of gender identity and gender expression in Anglo-American legal discourse*, 68 UNIV. OF TORONTO L.J. 80, 88 (2018).
  - 35 Kirkup, *supra* note 34, at 89.
  - 36 Richard Green and John Money, *Incongruous gender role: Nongenital manifestations in prepubertal boys*, 131 J. NERVOUS & MENTAL DISEASE 160, 160 (1960).
  - 37 Spencer E. Cahill, *Directions for an interactionist study of gender development*, 3 SYMBOLIC INTERACTION 123, 130 (1980).

- 38 JUDITH BUTLER, *GENDER TROUBLE: FEMINISM AND THE SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY*, 24–5 (1990).
- 39 Kirkup, *supra* note 34, at 90–1.
- 40 See, e.g., Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, S.S. 1974–5, c 61; see, e.g., Act to Amend the Health Act, S.N.B. 1975, c 27, ss 2–3; see, e.g., Act to Amend Ch 330 of the Revised Statutes, 1967, the Vital Statistics Act, S.N.S. 1977, c 55; see, e.g., Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, S.O. 1978, c 81, s 2.
- 41 Kirkup, *supra* note 34, at 93.
- 42 Ibid. at 94.
- 43 San Francisco Ord. 433–94 (Dec. 1994).
- 44 See, e.g., Iowa City Ord. 95–3697 (Oct. 1995).
- 45 *Browne v. Sudbury Integrated Nickel Operations*, 2016 HRTO 62 (2016).

## 18 ‘A Large and Longstanding Body’

### Historical Authority in the Science of Sex<sup>1</sup>

*Jeffrey W. Lockhart*

Scientists’ testimonies are used to endorse everything from toothpaste to nuclear power and weapons, but they are also used to challenge the very same things. And this is where the knife goes in because at present “scientific” support can be elicited on all sides of every question, so the “lay” public is constantly forced to decide which scientists to believe.

Where then is the vaunted objectivity of science? People are realizing that they must... develop criteria on which to make these decisions.<sup>2</sup>

—Ruth Hubbard

Notions of essential, biological sex differences play a major role in contemporary social and policy debates, ranging across the underrepresentation of women in science, government and corporate leadership; the division of household labour and childcare; the access and rights of trans and intersex people to use appropriate facilities or to exist at all; and the best way to educate boys and girls. In other chapters in this volume, Charlotte Emily Mears and Tyler Stacy each discuss how far right movements have taken up essentialist arguments about biological sex in service of their agendas. These arguments by the right rest their legitimacy on the authority of science and sex difference research. In chapter 19 of this volume, neuroscientist Tristan Fehr engages the substance of sex difference research head-on and shows how essentialist conclusions about sex are unwarranted in neuroscience. In this chapter, I take a different approach and use sociology of science to examine the competing claims to authority made by scientists studying sex. I argue that historical revisionism is a key means of establishing authority for scientists who advocate ‘essential sex differences’, and that this undermines the credibility of their claims.

More than almost any other field of scientific research, sex difference scholars push their findings to general audiences. A quick search for books with ‘sex difference’ in the title returns more than 2,000 volumes, in addition to the torrent of interviews and op-eds on the topic that researchers give to the popular press.<sup>3</sup> Statements like this one in the *Los Angeles Times* are routine: ‘the scientific reality is that it’s futile to treat



children as blank slates with no predetermined characteristics. Biology matters. A large and long-standing body of research literature shows that toy preferences, for example, are innate'.<sup>4</sup> Despite what proponents of essential differences would have us believe, there is also a large and long-standing body of research literature that is critical of the 'sex difference' paradigm. Many scientists have challenged the scientific basis for claims of essential sex differences, arguing that biology is more complex, less deterministic and less suited to categorical binaries than sex difference scholars claim. They include Ruth Bleier, Katherine L. Bryant, Gillian Einstein, Lise Eliot, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Tristan Fehr, Cordelia Fine, Geordana Grossi, Donna Haraway, Ginger Hoffman, Ruth Hubbard, Janet Hyde, Daphna Joel, Rebecca Jordan-Young, Anelis Kaiser, Marion Namenworth, Gina Rippon, Joan Roughgarden, Deboleena Roy, Raffaella Rumiati, Sigrid Schmitz, Stephanie Shields, Abigail Stewart, Banu Subramaniam, Sari van Anders and Mariamne Whatley. Far from being anti-science, these scholars have dedicated much of their careers to biological research.

I call these researchers and their work 'feminist science', a term many scholars who challenge essentialist 'sex difference' research have taken up.<sup>5</sup> Challenging the sex difference paradigm in biology does not mean insisting that men and women are identical. Instead, feminist biologists emphasise three points. First, biological traits show much more variation within groups (like men and women) than between them, which makes speaking categorically about things like male and female brains nonsensical. For instance, although the average height of men is greater than the average height of women, knowing a person's height tells us little about their sex, and vice versa. Indeed, while the field of sex differences relies on arbitrary cut-offs to define 'small', 'moderate' and 'large' differences (measured as Cohen's  $d > 0.2$ ,  $0.5$  and  $0.8$ ), these are all dramatically smaller than the sex difference in height ( $d = 2.0$ ), which statisticians point out is still *not* bimodal.<sup>6</sup> This means that when we look at height data for all humans together, we do not see two separate groups in need of explanation by way of sex, but rather one group (one bell shaped curve) with all sexes mixed throughout. Second, many biological traits result from or get modified by social and environmental experience. Everything from testosterone levels and brain morphology to even height and menstrual cycle has been shown to vary dramatically depending on experience and environment. In other words, biology is not immutable destiny. Third, speaking of 'sex differences' as essential results of innate biology often serves to reify harmful stereotypes and resist progressive calls for social change: *why fight against human nature?*

The terms of debate around sex differences are fraught. Neither feminist biologists nor sex difference scholars are homogeneous groups. Many resist simple labelling. For example, interdisciplinary feminist scientist Rebecca Jordan-Young at times separates the substance of

her scientific analysis from her feminist convictions in order to address other scientists on their own terms.<sup>7</sup> Other feminist scientists integrate the two more often in their argumentation style, but neither of these approaches is necessarily more feminist or more scientific. Simultaneously, many proponents of the sex difference paradigm refer to themselves as feminists or liberals, including prominent figures like Simon Baron-Cohen and Melissa Hines. Most proponents of sex difference research distance themselves from 'conservatives' or 'the right'. Even Charles Murray, writing for the American Enterprise Institute, tries to distance the science of essential, biological sex and race differences from conservative politics.<sup>8</sup> Steven Pinker argues that sex difference research and even *The Bell Curve* are 'liberal', despite the authors' and their fans' right-wing politics.<sup>9</sup> Such rhetorical moves are typical of attempts to reconstitute neoliberal right-wing positions as apolitical or a 'rational center'.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the very terminology and 'sides' in this debate are contested.

How are we to decide between the competing claims of these scientists? Their claims to authority often come down to competing historical narratives, either explicit or implicit, about the nature of sex difference research to date. In this chapter, I document three common types of historical revisionism used to bolster the authority of claims about sex differences. We have already seen the first type. The *Los Angeles Times* op-ed quoted earlier asserts a history in which innate, biological causes of social differences have long reigned as uncontested scientific facts. Such a history is blatantly revisionist, and the feminist biologists who are written out of that narrative typically respond by presenting extensive histories of debates within sex research to show that claims of innate, categorical differences are not uncontested. More subtly, many sex difference publications present revisionist histories through citational practice, selectively citing only supportive material or even placing references next to ideas that they do not support.<sup>11</sup>

In a second approach, sex difference scholars position themselves as historical underdogs, defenders of Science, Truth and Free Inquiry against the tyranny of 'political correctness', trans activists and feminists.<sup>12</sup> This version of history is at odds with the first, in which sex difference reigns unchallenged. More to the point, I show it is not historically defensible either. Finally, the third type of revisionism involves setting up and burning a straw man I call 'the big, bad social constructionist'. By selectively reporting on and demonising their critics, sex difference scholars are able to avoid substantive engagement with alternative explanations for the gendered world we live in. While the details of citations can sometimes feel peripheral to the main point, especially for non-academic audiences, they can have far-reaching consequences for perpetuating baseless 'academic urban legends' that translate into public policy and popular belief.<sup>13</sup>

In the rest of this chapter, I explore these claims in more detail. First, I sketch a brief history of sex difference research in order to clarify its political origins and rhetorical tactics. Then I present and evaluate three revisionist narratives common to sex difference research. Finally, I conclude by making explicit the role of scientists' motives in modern sex scholarship and calling for deeper engagement by both scientists and the public.

## **Eternal Return**

Before engaging with revisionist accounts, it is helpful to review some of the often omitted aspects of the real history of sex difference research. While writing this section, I entertained a once forgotten teenage fantasy: to write something using a patchwork of quoted material, with no original words of my own. One certainly could. Numerous books and articles have been dedicated to the critical history of sex difference research.<sup>14</sup> Beth Hess summed it up well when she wrote,

For two millennia, 'impartial experts' have given us such trenchant insights as the fact that women lack sufficient heat to boil the blood and purify the soul, that their heads are too small, their wombs too big, their hormones too debilitating, that they think with their hearts or the wrong side of the brain. The list is never-ending.<sup>15</sup>

Critiques of biological sex essentialism are well established.<sup>16</sup> Three decades ago, feminist biologists lamented the ongoing need to be 'going over ... old ground', and today they are still writing critical responses to 'Whac-a-Mole Myths' of sex difference research.<sup>17</sup>

But it does not take a kitchen table covered in feminist biology and history of science to catch on to the main thread of these arguments. They all show cases where the science of sex differences shifts over time in response to social beliefs and scientific advancement. Time and again, the social advancement of women motivates new waves of research on women's 'essential character', from the suffrage movement, to the feminism of the 60s and 70s, to the moment when women began outperforming men in education. Each time, sex difference scientists are explicit that they are reacting to feminist movements.<sup>18</sup> The purported biological basis of sex differences changes as science advances: women's brain fibres were prone to snapping until we discovered they were not; then their brains were too small, until we discovered brain weight does not correlate with intelligence.<sup>19</sup> The frontal and then parietal lobes were each, in turn, too small in women when those areas were seen as the locus of intelligence.<sup>20</sup> Then women's corpus callosum was different from men's, until we found that it was not.<sup>21</sup> And now when feminists point out that the corpus callosum research was unreliable, advocates of sex

differences say 'of course this is completely unfair', because the latest sex difference research has shifted yet again to new measures of the brain.<sup>22</sup> Whac-a-Mole indeed.

In order to make the political stakes and internal logic of sex differences clear, I trace out two threads of its intellectual lineage in more detail. The first highlights the political motives of this science and begins at least with Thomas Hobbes, whose seventeenth-century commentary on the state of nature described it as a war of all against all, intense competition for survival and dominance. A century later, T.R. Malthus published his *Essay on Population*, which describes human races competing to the point of 'extermination' through reproduction and argues that poor children should be left to starve as natural/divine punishment for their parents' choice to have children.<sup>23</sup> Enter Charles Darwin, who read Malthus and credited him as inspiration for his work on evolution.<sup>24</sup> Contemporaries Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels pointed out that Darwin's theories read directly as a transposition of Hobbes, Malthus and nineteenth-century liberalism onto the 'natural' (non-human) world, complete with markets, competition and specialisation of labour.<sup>25</sup>

In turn, Herbert Spencer and others brought these ideas back into the human world as Social Darwinism. In the end,

Darwin consciously borrowed from social theorists such as Malthus and Spencer some of the basic concepts of evolutionary theory. Spencer and others promptly used Darwinism to reinforce these very social theories and in the process bestowed upon them the force of natural law.<sup>26</sup>

Human social proclamations are not a perversion of some pure, objective, nature-focused Darwin. Darwin himself infamously wrote in *The Descent of Man* that 'the chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shown by man's attaining higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman'.<sup>27</sup> It was no accident that Darwin's cousin coined the term 'eugenics' in 1883, that Darwin's son hosted the First International Congress of Eugenics or that IQ testing was largely developed by eugenicists.<sup>28</sup> Evolutionary theories began as social theories of human aggression and hierarchy, and they have remained social theories.

While scientists rarely claim the term 'eugenics' for their own work after 1970, eugenics research has an 'openly continuous history' to the present day.<sup>29</sup> In 1969, the *Eugenics Review* renamed itself the *Journal of Biosocial Science*. That same year, *Eugenics Quarterly* changed its name to *Social Biology*. In this same vein, E.O. Wilson published *Sociobiology*, a hugely influential work that sparked what is now known as evolutionary psychology.<sup>30</sup> Wilson and evolutionary psychologists frequently cite Darwin's theory of sexual selection to argue a priori

that there must be innate, cognitive differences between human men and women, just as there are differences between the tails of male and female peacocks, because of how evolution works.<sup>31</sup> They assume that everything, including complex social processes and historically recent behaviours, necessarily serves some evolutionary purpose. Whatever we do today, they argue, must have been advantageous in the distant evolutionary past, when it was 'hardwired' into our genetics for future generations. And so, we get claims that men are good with maps and spatial reasoning because prehistoric men went out hunting, and that female monkeys prefer 'feminine' toys like cooking pots while males prefer 'masculine' police cars.<sup>32</sup> These positions represent a staunch opposition to social change: social life today is the necessary *telos* of millions of years of evolution. Social change is therefore against human nature. Such claims have been met with substantial empirical and theoretical criticism from social scientists and biologists alike.<sup>33</sup>

The second intellectual lineage illustrates another core idea from feminist biology: the construction of categorical difference from complex phenomena. The history of 'sex hormones' has been documented extensively.<sup>34</sup> Gonads, especially testes, have been considered the source or essence of gender in many historical periods. In 1889, Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard published the results of injecting himself with crushed guinea pig and dog testicles, claiming to experience increased virility and youthfulness. Although he admitted within a decade that the results were likely a placebo effect, the scientific quest to find the chemical essence of sex was on. By the 1920s and 1930s, substances called 'male hormone' and 'female hormone' had been isolated from gonadal tissue.

Almost immediately however, it became apparent that males—even stallions!—also had 'female hormone' in their bodies, and vice versa. Scientific advances showed that testosterone and estrogen are part of a larger family of steroid hormones; that they get converted into one another within the body; that they are also produced outside gonads; and that testosterone and estrogen are both necessary for the regular functioning of non-sexual parts of the body such as blood. In other words, the substances called 'male and female hormone' were not as categorically distinct in form, function or distribution, as scientists initially thought. Nevertheless, their association as categorical 'sex hormones' remains today, defining the 'true' essence of sex in professional athletics and justifying all sorts of gendered behaviour.<sup>35</sup> Modern parenting guides by scientists even still refer to them as 'male and female hormone'.<sup>36</sup>

By 1953, scientists had discovered that testosterone levels influence the genital development of fetuses. Not long after, others argued that the same was true for brains: fetal testosterone levels permanently 'organized' brains as male or female, just as they shaped genitals, therefore determining behaviour later in life.<sup>37</sup> This is the 'organizational/

activational hypothesis' that underlies most recent research on biological sex differences. Champions of the hypothesis write in terms of 'essential difference' and 'sexual dimorphism' (literally 'two forms'). They discuss how men and women's brains are 'hard-wired' differently, creating a sense of clean, categorical distinction that, like the name 'sex hormones', is far from the biological reality.<sup>38</sup> Nearly every work in this genre admits that no such clean, categorical distinction exists in human brains or behaviour. Authors include illustrations of two overlapping bell curves and admonitions that average differences between men and women should not be read to mean all men or all women are one way or another. Baron-Cohen goes so far as to say that individual women may have 'male brains'.

As Gina Rippon points out, however, readers 'may not hover too long on the semantic niceties of a "male brain" not meaning "the brain from a man"'.<sup>39</sup> Sex difference scientists do not hover long on such niceties either. In *The Essential Difference*, Baron-Cohen introduces brains as a spectrum from those that are good at systematising (type S) to those good at empathising (type E), with a plurality of brains falling statistically in the balanced middle (type B).<sup>40</sup> Within a few pages, however, he switches to calling type S 'male brains' and type E 'female brains', disregarding his own assertion that the types do not correspond neatly with male and female people. Balanced brains, supposedly the most common type of brains, are entirely absent from most of his discussion. In keeping with the title, readers are left with a sense of *Essential Difference* between men and women. As with hormones themselves, complex brain biology that affects both men and women gets recast in terms of simple, categorical, inborn difference between male and female. Such is the internal logic of the sex difference paradigm.

## It Is Known

For the most part, none of this history appears in writing from proponents of sex differences. Science writing generally does not go into the history of its field. Sex difference research is no exception: most papers and books focus on recent advances and current knowledge, leaving history of science as an altogether separate discipline. Writing about sex differences, Unger and Dottolo observe that 'history is not highly regarded by psychology because of the field's commitment to... "just the facts"'.<sup>41</sup> Consciously or otherwise, authors write centuries of controversy, and their position in it, out of sex science. In so doing, they perform the 'god trick' of appearing to have a 'view from nowhere' (i.e. with no social history or agenda), which lends their work scientific credibility by making it seem objective.<sup>42</sup> Since all research is influenced by the motives, perspectives and assumptions of researchers, Sandra Harding refers to this as 'weak objectivity' and argues that explicit engagement

with the social dimensions of scientific work—reflexivity on the part of researchers—can produce better science.<sup>43</sup> Without reflexivity, flawed science and revisionist histories may flourish.

More insidious than the general lack of historical reflection, however, is the elision of specific, germane controversies. Take, for example, Alexander and Hines' study of vervet monkeys.<sup>44</sup> The authors concluded that monkeys, with no human gender socialisation, showed gender-typical toy preferences that mirrored human children. Therefore, they argued, there must be some biological, innate component to differences in interests between human men and women. The study has been critiqued numerous times for including confounding variables; for downplaying its own no-difference findings; for using toy gender labels that are inconsistent with the explanations offered; for presenting the toys in a nonstandard way; and more.<sup>45</sup> Given how gender labels were assigned to toys, the results also contradict the only similar study published to date, which used rhesus monkeys.<sup>46</sup> The vervet study, and even its picture of two monkeys playing with toys, is ubiquitous in reviews of sex difference research.<sup>47</sup> Yet those who cite the study rarely mention that it is contested. Even the original authors—who are aware of critiques—present their findings with less ambiguity over time.<sup>48</sup> Of the 'feminine' toys, a cooking pot and a doll, the pot is downplayed. The confounding colour variable disappears, along with males' equal preference for 'masculine' and 'feminine' toys. And the rhesus study is cited as corroboration rather than contradiction.<sup>49</sup>

Many aspects of this are normal in science. Researchers publish new ideas and results. Replies and critiques routinely follow. Subsequent references to work are generally simpler than initial reports of it. In the field of sex differences, these simplifications led to a false sense of consensus among studies with conflicting methodology.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes, initial scientific findings turn out to be unsupported by follow-up research. Meta-analyses have shown that this is very common in the sex difference literature.<sup>51</sup> It is a core feature of science that we sometimes publish incorrect or contested conclusions. Science is a process, not an infallible dogma.

This becomes problematic, however, when critical engagement is ignored and findings are presented as if they were universally accepted. For example, consider retractions. Papers are retracted in every discipline for many reasons, ranging from benign statistical errors to gross misconduct and data fabrication. Yet an analysis of 1,775 retractions found that retracting papers does little to stem the flow of citations to those papers, and that the vast majority of citations to retracted papers cite them as if they had not been retracted.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately then, criticising, correcting or even retracting bad research is not enough. Scientists in general, and sex difference scholars in particular, need to engage with the historical context and debate around their sources in all of their work if they are to avoid perpetuating inaccurate information or settle methodological disagreements.<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately, some sex difference scholars are actively hostile to historical perspectives. Two critical reviews of feminist neuroscientist Gina Rippon's recent book<sup>54</sup> are instructive:

Rippon also builds her case with historical examples of 'neuro-sexism'. One shockingly offensive example she quotes is from the anthropologist Gustave Le Bon, who wrote in 1895: 'Women... represent the most inferior forms of human evolution...' However, Rippon goes farther still. She argues that... scientists are perpetuating such historical sexism in a new guise.<sup>55</sup>

A book like this is very difficult for someone knowledgeable about the field to review seriously.... Suffice to say it is replete with tactics that are now standard operating procedure for the anti-sex difference writers.... tactics include... resurrecting 19th century arguments almost no modern neuroscientist knows of, or cares about.<sup>56</sup>

Both reviews refuse to engage with the substance of historical comparisons offered by feminists.<sup>57</sup> Bringing the history of sex difference research into contemporary scientific discussions is framed as 'offensive' and irrelevant. This hostility to discussion of history is what Nancy Tuana calls an 'epistemology of ignorance'.<sup>58</sup>

Tellingly, Cahill admits that neuroscientists do not know the history of their own field or the claims they make. Similarly, Baron-Cohen recounts a 'recent' revelation:

Professor Konrad Lorenz [is] widely regarded to be the founding father of ethology, and the master of careful behavior observation and measurement.... I read his books at the tender age of nineteen.... A recent [2001] book points out that, despite his high intelligence, the esteemed Lorenz was unable to see that the political ideology of ethnic purification in Germany in the 1940s where he worked, and indeed his own views on eugenics, were hurtful and even dangerous.<sup>59</sup>

Lorenz was a Nazi who defended his eugenicist beliefs and research long after the war.<sup>60</sup> This revelation did not prevent Baron-Cohen from writing a glowing apologia for Lorenz. Indeed, Lorenz is brought up only because he is an example of the 'male brain', which is brilliant at systematising but poor at empathising (and thus prone to being both a great scientist and a Nazi, with no apparent conflict between the two). Some sex difference scholars, then, are not simply unaware of the political and social history behind their ideas; they are also unfazed by learning about it. Most are not so explicit. Hines, for instance, has read and replied to books by Fausto-Sterling and Jordan-Young. But her replies ignore their lengthy, well-documented historical arguments as if they were irrelevant to modern scientific questions.<sup>61</sup>



## The Scientist as Recently Liberated

When sex difference scholars do discuss the history of their field, many tell a story of overcoming oppression. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Alice Dreger's *Galileo's Middle Finger*. Dreger begins by building up her progressive credentials: she calls herself a 'liberal feminist', recounts her support for intersex activism and celebrates the work of 'Marxist and feminist science-studies scholars' like Hubbard.<sup>62</sup> Quickly, however, readers learn that she has been condemned and pushed out of the academy by the powerful forces of 'PC culture', feminists and trans activists for seeking 'dangerous' scientific truths, just as Galileo Galilei was persecuted for his research. Such 'truths' include defining transgender as a paraphilia and defending a biological drive to rape with evolutionary psychology.<sup>63</sup> In response to critics, Dreger describes her own 'reactionary' desire to 'make a point of studying ... *race and IQ*', which she admits can do 'no good and much harm', just 'in order to prove how important truth seeking is'.<sup>64</sup> In the end, she bucks the oppressive forces that would silence her and forges her way as an independent scholar.

Baron-Cohen tells a similar story. In the first pages of *The Essential Difference*, we read that he 'would like to believe that, deep down, men and women's minds do not differ in essence' and he 'remain[s] a staunch supporter of efforts to eliminate inequality in society'. He was hesitant to write because,

Discussing sex differences of course drops you straight into the heart of the political correctness debate.... The topic was just too politically sensitive to complete in the 1990s. I postponed finishing this book because I was unsure whether a discussion of psychological sex differences could proceed dispassionately.... My women friends, most of whom consider themselves feminists, have persuaded me that the time is ripe for such discussion.<sup>65</sup>

Cahill echoes the same sentiment. He stresses his progressive commitment to including women in medical research, so that treatments do not have unforeseen adverse effects.<sup>66</sup> Yet he received

strong advice to steer clear of studying sex differences from a senior colleague around the year 2000.... For the vast majority of his long and distinguished neuroscience career, exploring sex influences was indeed a terrific way... to become a pariah in the eyes of the neuroscience mainstream.<sup>67</sup>

Dreger, Baron-Cohen, Cahill and others deploy a common narrative: despite their liberal and feminist beliefs, their scientific pursuit of objective truth has led them to insist that men and women are innately different in their abilities and desires. Those who disagree with them are a 'cult' of

'extremists' with 'deeply ingrained, implicit (but false) assumption[s]'.<sup>68</sup> Sex difference scientists, we are told, pay a steep political price for telling their uncomfortable truths, just as Galileo did.

Interestingly, feminist biologists tell essentially the same narrative, but in reverse. Hubbard's is representative of many early feminist biologists' accounts:

That I was able to turn my attention to these issues was due to the fact that in 1973, owing in large part to the political work of the women's movement, the tenuous position I had held at Harvard became stable. In an unusual step, the university promoted a few of us from the typical women's ghetto of 'research associate and lecturer' to tenured professorships.<sup>69</sup>

From her newly secure position, Hubbard was able to pursue her own research interests and develop a network of colleagues who would go on to publish and edit some of the foundational works in feminist science studies. Changing culture and social movements led to new-found academic freedom, which enabled a career doing otherwise unpopular work. By the mid-1990s, mainstream biologists remarked with horror that 'this [feminist, leftist biology] literature grows with astonishing speed' and 'that the only widespread, *obvious* discrimination [in science] today is against white males'.<sup>70</sup>

Still, feminist biology was a tenuous field. Many of its major figures transitioned from science into women's studies, philosophy or history departments. Many of its publications were in humanities-focused journals like *Signs* and *Hypatia*, or in books and edited volumes. Not all, of course. But it is harder for feminist biologists to make it in science than for sex difference scholars, Fausto-Sterling argues. In response to claims that it just recently became safe to study sex differences in 1992, she pointed out that she wrote a whole book about sex difference research from the 1970s. 'With few exceptions', she says,

scientists who have taken a different road have a far more difficult time. Their work is less well-known and certainly receives less press coverage, they have a harder time finding jobs, and they often end up working in less prestigious schools, making it harder to get grant money.<sup>71</sup>

Such material disadvantages suggest a real cost to doing critical feminist work in the life sciences, in direct contradiction of sex difference scholars' claim that feminists set and police research agendas in the field.

So which narrative is better supported by the evidence? The list of more than two dozen biologists, endocrinologists, geneticists, molecular biologists, neuroscientists, psychophysicologists and zoologists in this chapter's opening shows that critics of sex difference are not anti-science Luddites.

They believe that the biological aspects of sex and gender are worth studying and important for non-scientists as well.<sup>72</sup> But for all their intellectual care and success, feminist biologists have never reigned supreme. Politics before 2000 did not prevent the publication of sex difference research. More than that, ‘sex differences’ has always been a more successful, dominant field of research than feminist biology. In 1997, when Baron-Cohen and Cahill felt unsafe speaking about sex differences, the author of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* boasted that the book had ‘sold more than ten million copies’ and was ‘a bestseller in more than 40 languages’.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Baron-Cohen credits another pop-science best seller from 1989 for his core idea about ‘brain sex’.<sup>74</sup>

Figure 18.1 shows the volume of research about sex differences and critiques of it published from 1900 to 2018. It is clear from the publication

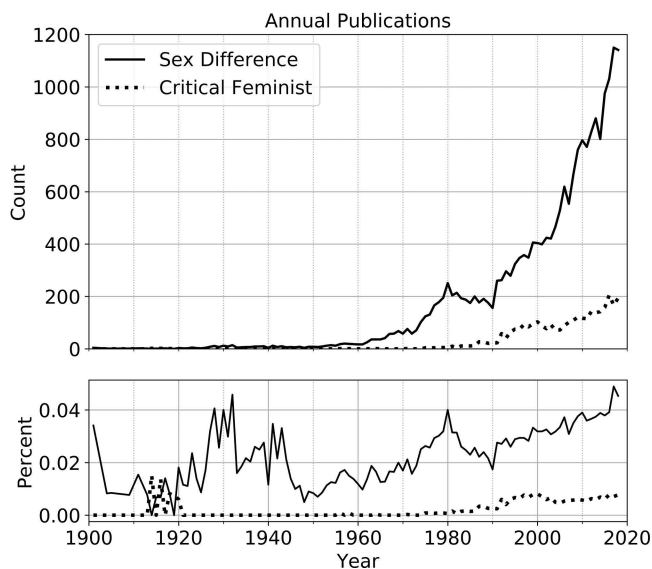


Figure 18.1 Publications in sex differences and feminist biology, 1900–2018.

The top panel shows absolute counts, while the bottom panel shows the same data as a per cent of all publications in the Web of Science Core Collection. Sex difference publications are counted as those with some variant of ‘sex difference’, ‘sex[ual] dimorphism’ or ‘[fe]male brain’ in their title or abstract. Critical feminist publications are counted as those with some variant of ‘[sex/gender] similarity’, ‘feminis[t/m]’ and also ‘[biology/science]’; or authored by any of a set of feminist critics. Medical and animal-only publications are excluded. If a publication matches both searches, it is counted as critical feminist only. This approach is a conservative estimate of sex difference publications’ dominance: including medical and animal publications doubles the gap; and adding difference authors, removing feminist ones or including ‘gender difference’ widens it as well.

counts in the top panel that those in favour of sex differences have always dramatically outnumbered critical feminist publications. At no point were critical perspectives dominant.<sup>75</sup> The total number of scientific publications has grown exponentially over time, so the rapid growth of sex difference publications should be read with caution. The lower panel shows the same data as a per cent of all publications in a given year. From it, we can see that sex difference research has been a part of English language academic publications throughout the last century. It was particularly common from 1925 to 1945, and has generally grown as a share of all publications since 1950. At its lowest points in the last 100 years, sex difference research made up a similar proportion of all scientific publications as feminist biology did at its highest points.

These data fit well with the histories told by feminist biologists: social change and feminist movements brought more women into the academy and offered some of them tenure in the 1970s and 1980s. Newly secure in their positions, it became safer and more feasible to publish critiques of sex difference literature. These early publications and career advances paved the way for subsequent generations of feminist biologists. More than that, they correspond with a ten year period of decline in publications about sex differences. This may be where some difference scholars' sense of persecution comes from. Their field really was in decline during the 1980s, while feminist scholarship was on the rise. Pro-difference papers held a near monopoly before 1980, when they made up 98% of all publications on the topic. Their market share fell to just 79% of new papers in 1997, when the share of feminist critiques peaked. Still, sex difference scholarship has always been dominant, and scholars like Melissa Hines, who published sex difference research in the 1980s, do not, then or now, tell the stories of being recently liberated or persecuted by 'PC Police' that later generations of difference scholars tell.

## **The Big, Bad Social Constructionist**

When they are not revising history to erase all critique or to paint themselves as the victims of powerful critics, some sex difference scientists tell a cautionary tale about the dangers of disagreeing with them, which conveniently sidesteps the need to engage with gender socialisation research. This is the tragic 'John/Joan Story', about a clinical patient whose real name was eventually revealed as David Reimer. Shortly after Reimer was born in 1965, his penis was destroyed in a botched circumcision. John Money and Anke Ehrhardt counselled his parents to raise him as a girl and oversaw his care. They published claiming wild success in socially reassigning gender. As he got older, however, Reimer transitioned back to living as a boy, had his penis surgically reconstructed and eventually married a woman. He died by suicide in 2004. As sex difference proponents tell it, 'the irreversibility of programmed gender identity is clearly

illustrated by the sad story of the John–Joan–John case'.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, this seems like a clear-cut case of biology trumping socialisation: Reimer was born a boy, and despite many efforts to socialise him otherwise, he insisted that he was a boy.

The John/Joan Story is used for more than demonstrating the importance of biology and the impotence of socialisation for gender, however. Sex difference proponents use it to argue that those who emphasise gender socialisation are not only *wrong*, they are actively *harmful*. In a typical statement, Baron-Cohen says, 'John Money, the infamous paediatrician of the 1960s, ignored biology at his peril, in claiming that a child's gender could be determined purely by experience.... Tragically, this dishonest sex reassignment recently led to suicide'.<sup>77</sup> The implication is that the people who disagree with them are not simply defying Biological Truth; they are *causing misery and suicide*. Money is figured as the quintessential big, bad social constructionist, the villain in a cautionary tale.<sup>78</sup>

The team that led Reimer's care acted unethically. They reported wild success in the academic literature for years when it was clear that Reimer was deeply unhappy with his gender assignment.<sup>79</sup> Worse, their efforts to socialise Reimer into a girl were highly traumatic, including medical deception, frequent physical and psychological examinations about his sex and 'simulated' sexual intercourse with his twin brother.<sup>80</sup> Many aspects of his treatment, including medically unnecessary surgery on children too young to consent, withholding medical information from patients and frequent sexual examinations, are things intersex activists have campaigned against.<sup>81</sup> Even though these details could be used to further demonise Money, they are left out of essentialist accounts. Reimer's traumatic and highly unusual childhood means that the John/Joan Story is not representative of research on gender socialisation or the social construction of gender. As a response to that work, it is a straw-man. In order to lump their critics together and pit 'biology' against a 'socialization' boogeyman, sex difference proponents tell a selective history. There are also multiple cases of other babies like Reimer who had more positive outcomes, but such cases get less attention in the media and are generally omitted from sex difference proponents' accounts.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps most surprisingly, the accounts demonising Money for denying biology leave out the fact that Money and Ehrhardt went on to become major proponents of brain organisation theory and increasingly dismissive of social factors.<sup>83</sup>

Beyond the John/Joan Story, proponents of sex differences have almost no engagement with the vast array research on the social aspects of sex and gender. Sociologists have long studied socialisation and the social construction of sex and gender. Indeed, 'Sex and Gender' is the largest section of the American Sociological Association, with more than 1,100 members. Yet one is hard pressed to find any references to the

relevant sociological research in sex difference publications.<sup>84</sup> Even in books with sprawling 28- and 44-page reference lists, Baron-Cohen and Hines each cite just a single article from a sociology journal and each cite only eight sources with a predominantly sociological argument.<sup>85</sup> By comparison, Baron-Cohen cites publications where he is first author 29 times, and Hines does so 19 times. Baron-Cohen's chapter on 'Culture' is primarily populated by citations to evolutionary psychologists who are critical of cultural influence.

The situation in most journal articles, where space is more limited, is bleaker still. Many simply ignore social influences on gender. Dick Swaab and colleagues frequently assert that 'there is no proof that the social environment after birth has an effect on the development of gender identity'.<sup>86</sup> In support of this claim, they offer a single citation to Simon LeVay's controversial 1990s research. Others point to a 1991 analysis to argue that there are minimal differences in how parents treat boys and girls and then move on.<sup>87</sup> Yet the same 1991 study has also been cited to show the opposite, and to clarify that similar treatment of boys and girls by parents happens only when children conform to gender expectations.<sup>88</sup> These latter interpretations are supported by the sociological literature.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, a parent-only focus ignores the broader social milieu. Children are exposed to messages about gender from parents, yes, but also from siblings, peers, teachers and coaches; from books, movies and television; from sex-segregated activities, clothing and toy store isles; and from myriad other sources. As children and adults participate in a gendered world, we do not simply absorb outside influence: we actively participate in constructing group differences for any arbitrary groups we find ourselves in.<sup>90</sup> When scientists fail to engage with the extensive research on how social processes influence gender differences among people, they present a distorted view of the relevant, empirically grounded research on sex and gender.

## Conclusion

I have focused on common examples of historical revisionism within sex difference research, but it is important to note that these patterns are not universal. Like their feminist critics, the proponents of sex difference research are a heterogeneous group with varied agendas and arguments. Some, like James Damore, Anne Moir, John Gray (author of the *Mars and Venus* series), Leonard Sax and Debra Soh, write for a non-scientific audience. They make explicit personal, social and policy arguments about hiring fewer women in technology firms, single-sex schools, division of household labour or parenting style. Most scholars who publish academic work on sex differences, however, ritually distance themselves from such prescriptive, deterministic writing by telling readers, 'the view that men are from Mars and women Venus paints the differences

between the two sexes as too extreme'.<sup>91</sup> Statements like these position them as part of the 'reasonable middle' between extreme biological or cultural determinism. They frequently raise the same social and policy questions as their motivation, claiming they want to shed light on those debates. But after many pages arguing for innate gender differences and the natural inevitability of gender inequality in work, aggression and caring, they stop short of answering social policy questions, leaving readers to infer the rest based on stereotypes.<sup>92</sup>

Sex difference scientists' motivations are varied. Some, like Simon Baron-Cohen, express worry about oppression and denigration of men. He says that 'hopefully, in reading this book, men will also experience a resurgence of pride at all the things they can do well', a list which includes 'the most wonderful scientists, engineers,... bankers', and 'even lawyers', compared to women's 'primary school teachers, nurses,... or personal staff'.<sup>93</sup> Scholars like Baron-Cohen are primarily concerned with differences in *abilities*, what men and women are good at and so what roles in society they should fill. In contrast, scholars like Melissa Hines are explicit that they do not see socially meaningful differences in abilities, but rather in *preferences*. Noting the well-documented placebo effect and stereotype threat influences on performance, she admonishes her colleagues: 'reports that hormones cause girls or boys to perform more poorly in certain areas or limit their occupational prospects, even when erroneous, are not benign', because such reports can cause the very outcomes they claim to describe.<sup>94</sup> For Hines, differences in play behaviour and occupational outcomes result from innate preferences for certain kinds of activity, preferences we share with our monkey relatives, not from women's lack of ability or from social influences.<sup>95</sup> Still others, like Larry Cahill, say they are motivated by a desire to ensure medical treatments are tested on women before they are approved for treatment of women.<sup>96</sup> As always, some scholars confound simple categorisation. Alice Dreger and Sara Blaffer Hrdy, for example, have each defended and also critiqued sex difference research on both scientific and social grounds.

Almost no one in or adjacent to the scientific community has argued for the outright superiority of men over women in the last few decades. Sex difference scholars ritually invoke the refrain that 'overall intelligence is not better in one sex or the other' in order to show that they, and science, are not sexist.<sup>97</sup> Superiority may exist in particular abilities or interests, but overall men and women are 'equal', just not 'the same'.<sup>98</sup> Amusingly, the scientific 'truth' that men and women have equal average intelligence is a deliberate choice on the part of intelligence scientists. It is 'socially constructed' in the most straightforward way. Intelligence testing and measurement was long controlled by eugenicists for the purpose of demonstrating the superiority/inferiority of ethnic, class and gender groups.<sup>99</sup> Later tests were revised to minimise group difference

rather than establish it. Now, questions on intelligence tests are included either if they show no gender difference in performance or if they show a small difference that can be balanced out by another question. Questions showing large gender differences are thrown out.<sup>100</sup> Scientists have 'the ability to construct valid measures of intelligence that would favor either sex', but deliberately chose to find sameness instead.<sup>101</sup> So, if sex difference scholars are right, and modern science is 'not sexist' because it finds that women and men have the same general intelligence, then *modern science is not sexist because scientists chose not to look for sex differences*.

Opposition to the sex difference paradigm in scientific research is not made up of powerful, anti-science ideologues out to enforce 'political correctness'. Rather, feminist biology is made up of those who care deeply about and thoughtfully engage with research on sex and gender. They call on their colleagues and the public to avoid the scientifically unsound rhetoric of essential, innate and categorical differences and the socially harmful effects that rhetoric has. The solution is more and deeper engagement with the science of sex and gender, not less. And that engagement must include a fuller, more accurate picture of the field's history and citational practices.

## Notes

- 1 I thank Chalem Bolton, Dominique Canning, Megan Carroll, Erin Cech, Lanora Johnson, Rebecca Jordan-Young, Sari van Anders, Lauren Wilcox and Jesse Yeh for their thoughtful feedback and engagement during the course of this research. I also thank the University of Michigan Library for its immense support in locating materials and for providing access to the Web of Science. While working on this project, I have been funded in part by the Gates Cambridge Trust and an NICHD training grant to the Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan (T32HD007339).
- 2 Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 9.
- 3 This holds in most large catalogues, and is discussed at length in Robyn Bluhm, 'Beyond Neurosexism: Is It Possible to Defend the Female Brain?', in *Neurofeminism: Issues at the Intersection of Feminist Theory and Cognitive Science*, ed. Robyn Bluhm, Anne Jaap Jacobson, and Heidi Lene Maibom (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 230–45.
- 4 Debra W Soh, 'The Futility of Gender-Neutral Parenting', *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 2017, [www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-soh-gender-neutral-parenting-20170106-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-soh-gender-neutral-parenting-20170106-story.html); see also Ruben C. Gur and Raquel E. Gur, 'Complementarity of Sex Differences in Brain and Behavior: From Laterality to Multimodal Neuroimaging', *Journal of Neuroscience Research* 95, no. 1–2 (2017): 189–99. Versions of this debate go back to John Locke's 'tabula rasa', and more recently Steven Pinker's critiques of 'The Blank Slate'.
- 5 For example Ruth Bleier, 'Sex Differences Research: Science or Belief?', in *Feminist Approaches to Science* (New York: Pergamon, 1986), 147–64; Deboleena Roy, 'Cosmopolitics and the Brain: The Co-Becoming of



- Practices in Feminism and Neuroscience', in *Neurofeminism: Issues at the Intersection of Feminist Theory and Cognitive Science*, ed. Robyn Bluhm, Anne Jaap Jacobson, and Heidi Lene Maibom (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 175–92.
- 6 Mark F Schilling, Ann E Watkins, and William Watkins, 'Is Human Height Bimodal?', *American Statistician* 56, no. 3 (2002): 223–29.
  - 7 Rebecca M. Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 9, 200.
  - 8 Charles Murray, 'Conclusion: Why It All Matters and What Is To Be Done', in *The Science on Women and Science*, ed. Christina Hoff Sommers (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2009), 285–300.
  - 9 Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002).
  - 10 Lisa Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003).
  - 11 Rebecca M. Young and Evan Balaban, 'Psychoneuroindocrinology', *Nature*; *London* 443, no. 7112 (October 12, 2006): 634.
  - 12 Roy, 'Cosmopolitics and the Brain: The Co-Becoming of Practices in Feminism and Neuroscience', 189; Young and Balaban, 'Psychoneuroindocrinology', 634.
  - 13 Ole Bjørn Rekdal, 'Academic Urban Legends', *Social Studies of Science* 44, no. 4 (August 1, 2014): 638–54.
  - 14 Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Viola Klein, *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1946); Veronica Sanz, 'No Way Out of the Binary: A Critical History of the Scientific Production of Sex', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 1 (August 17, 2017): 1–27; Shulamit Reinharz, 'Patriarchal Pontifications', *Society* 23, no. 6 (September 1, 1986): 23–29 to name a few.
  - 15 'Beyond Dichotomy: Drawing Distinctions and Embracing Differences', *Sociological Forum* 5, no. 1 (1990): 81.
  - 16 For example Helen Mayer Hacker, 'Marx, Weber and Pareto on the Changing Status of Women', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 12, no. 2 (1953): 149–62; Robert H. Lowie and Leta Stetter Hollingworth, 'Science and Feminism', *The Scientific Monthly* 3, no. 3 (1916): 277–84; François Poullan de La Barre, *De l'égalité Des Deux Sexes* (Paris, 1673).
  - 17 Whac-a-Mole is an arcade game where players strike down small puppets. Each time one mole is struck, another pops up somewhere else. Gina Rippon, *The Gendered Brain: The New Neuroscience That Shatters the Myth of the Female Brain* (London: The Bodley Head, 2019); Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 259.
  - 18 Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science behind Sex Differences* (London, 2010); Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*.
  - 19 Fine, *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science behind Sex Differences*, xxiv.
  - 20 Stephanie A Shields, 'Nineteenth-Century Evolutionary Theory and Male Scientific Bias', in *Sociobiology: Beyond Nature/Nurture?*, ed. George W Barlow and James Silverberg, 1980, 489–502.
  - 21 Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (Basic Books, 2000), chap. 5.
  - 22 Larry Cahill, 'Fundamental Sex Difference in Human Brain Architecture', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 2 (January 14, 2014): 577.

- 23 *An Essay On Population* (1798; repr., London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1958).
- 24 Darwin is not alone in his Malthusian origins: like many sociologists and demographers, I am currently employed at a Population Studies Center.
- 25 This chain of argumentation is summarised at greater length in Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, 90–92.
- 26 Hubbard, 90–92.
- 27 Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871; repr., D. Appleton, 1901), 576.
- 28 Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, 181–2; Rachel Gur-Arie, 'American Eugenics Society (1926–1972)', in *Embryo Project Encyclopedia*, November 22, 2014, <http://embryo.asu.edu/handle/10776/8241>; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Rev. and expanded (1981; repr., New York: Norton, 1996).
- 29 Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2010), 542.
- 30 Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975; repr., Harvard University Press, 2000).
- 31 For example Larry Cahill, 'Sex Influences on Brain and Emotional Memory: The Burden of Proof Has Shifted', in *Progress in Brain Research*, ed. Ivanka Savic, vol. 186, Sex Differences in the Human Brain, Their Underpinnings and Implications (Elsevier, 2010), 29–40; David C. Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences*, 2nd ed, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010).
- 32 Gerianne M. Alexander and Melissa Hines, 'Sex Differences in Response to Children's Toys in Nonhuman Primates (*Cercopithecus Aethiops Sabaeus*)', *Evolution and Human Behavior* 23 (2002): 467–79; Pinker, *The Blank Slate*.
- 33 See e.g. Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jill S. Quadagno, 'Paradigms in Evolutionary Theory: The Sociobiological Model of Natural Selection', *American Sociological Review* 44, no. 1 (1979): 100–9; Ruth Hubbard, 'Have Only Men Evolved?', in *Biological Woman--The Convenient Myth*, ed. Ruth Hubbard, Mary Sue Henifin, and Barbara Fried (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1982), 17–46; Stephanie A Shields, 'Functionalism, Darwinism, and Advances in the Psychology of Women and Gender: From the 19th Century to the 21st', *Feminism & Psychology* 26, no. 4 (November 1, 2016): 397–404; see also a related critique in Aaron Panofsky, *Misbehaving Science: Controversy and the Development of Behavior Genetics* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).
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- 36 Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harmony Books, 2017).

- 37 Rebecca M. Jordan-Young and Raffaella I. Rumiati, 'Hardwired for Sexism? Approaches to Sex/Gender in Neuroscience', *Neuroethics* 5, no. 3 (December 1, 2012): 305–15; C. H. Phoenix et al., 'Organizing Action of Prenatally Administered Testosterone Propionate on the Tissues Mediating Mating Behavior in the Female Guinea Pig', *Endocrinology* 65 (1959): 163–96.
- 38 Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Male and Female Brains and the Truth about Autism* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); Daphna Joel et al., 'Sex beyond the Genitalia: The Human Brain Mosaic', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 50 (December 15, 2015): 15468–73; Digit ratios are now a very popular measure in this line of research, although the evidence supporting them is scant: Mitch Leslie, 'The Mismeasure of Hands', *Science* 364, no. 6444 (June 7, 2019): 923–5.
- 39 Rippon, *The Gendered Brain*, 240–1.
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- 41 'Historical Significance of Shields' 1975 Essay: A Brief Commentary on Four Major Contributions', *Feminism & Psychology* 26, no. 3 (August 1, 2016): 278; Shields, 'Functionalism, Darwinism, and Advances in the Psychology of Women and Gender'.
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- 43 Sandra Harding, 'Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity'?', in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York: Routledge, 1993), 49–82.
- 44 'Sex Differences in Response to Children's Toys in Nonhuman Primates (*Cercopithecus Aethiops Sabaeus*)'.
- 45 Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*, 234–36; Fine, *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences*, 124–26; Lise Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How Small Differences Grow into Troublesome Gaps - and What We Can Do about It* (Boston, MA: Mariner, 2009), 108.
- 46 Janice M. Hassett, Erin R. Siebert, and Kim Wallen, 'Sex Differences in Rhesus Monkey Toy Preferences Parallel Those of Children', *Hormones and Behavior* 54, no. 3 (August 1, 2008): 359–64.
- 47 See e.g. Melissa Hines, 'Gender Development and the Human Brain', *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 34, no. 1 (2011): 69–88; Ai-Min Bao and Dick F. Swaab, 'Sexual Differentiation of the Human Brain: Relation to Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation and Neuropsychiatric Disorders', *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology*, Sexual Differentiation of Sexual Behavior and Its Orientation, 32, no. 2 (April 1, 2011): 214–26; Soh, 'The Futility of Gender-Neutral Parenting'; Sax, *Why Gender Matters*.
- 48 Melissa Hines and Gerianne M. Alexander, 'Commentary: Monkeys, Girls, Boys and Toys: A Confirmation Comment on "Sex Differences in Toy Preferences: Striking Parallels between Monkeys and Humans"', *Hormones and Behavior* 54, no. 3 (August 2008): 478–81.
- 49 Hines, 'Gender Development and the Human Brain'; Melissa Hines, *Brain Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); to her credit, Hines has revised her position on other branches of sex difference research after years of methodological critique: Leslie, 'The Mismeasure of Hands?'
- 50 Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*; Bleier, 'Sex Differences Research: Science or Belief?'
- 51 Janet Shibley Hyde, 'The Gender Similarities Hypothesis', *American Psychologist* 60, no. 6 (2005): 581–92.

- 52 'A Visual Analytic Study of Retracted Articles in Scientific Literature', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 64, no. 2 (2013): 234–53, doi:10.1002/asi.22755.
- 53 Shields, 'Functionalism, Darwinism, and Advances in the Psychology of Women and Gender'.
- 54 Rippon, *The Gendered Brain*.
- 55 Simon Baron-Cohen, 'The Gendered Brain by Gina Rippon Review—Do Men and Women Have Different Brains?', *The Times*, March 8, 2019, sec. Saturday Review, [www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-gendered-brain-by-gina-rippon-review-do-men-and-women-have-different-brains-vq757qnp](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-gendered-brain-by-gina-rippon-review-do-men-and-women-have-different-brains-vq757qnp).
- 56 Larry Cahill, 'Denying the Neuroscience of Sex Differences', *Quillette* (blog), March 29, 2019, <https://quillette.com/2019/03/29/denying-the-neuroscience-of-sex-differences/>. These reviews were published in right-leaning venues: *The Times* (London) and the 'intellectual dark web' blog Quillette. Positive coverage of Rippon's book appeared both in left-leaning venues like *The Guardian* and also in *Nature*.
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- 60 Konrad Lorenz, 'Konrad Lorenz – Biographical', *NobelPrize.org*, 1973, [www.nobelprize.org/prizes/medicine/1973/lorenz/biographical/](http://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/medicine/1973/lorenz/biographical/).
- 61 Hines, 'Gender Development and the Human Brain'.
- 62 Alice Domurat Dreger, *Galileo's Middle Finger: Heretics, Activists, and the Search for Justice in Science* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 4.
- 63 For critique, see Julia Serano, 'A Matter of Perspective: A Transsexual Woman-Centric Critique of Dreger's 'Scholarly History' of the Bailey Controversy', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 37, no. 3 (June 1, 2008): 491–4; Cheryl Brown Travis, *Evolution, Gender, and Rape* (MIT Press, 2003); Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women*, Athene Series (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 32.
- 64 'Domurat' Dreger, *Galileo's Middle Finger*, 132–33 emphasis original.
- 65 Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, 11; for an argument that such feminists are detached from the goals, motives and history of feminism, see Steven Epstein, *Inclusion: The Politics of Difference in Medical Research* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- 66 Scholars point to the 2013 US FDA decision to recommend different dosages of sleep medication for men and women as proof that sex is key in medical research. Subsequent research has shown that that decision was misguided, however, suggesting the need for caution rather than zealous pursuit of innate sex differences. David Greenblatt, Jerold Harman, and Thomas Roth, 'Zolpidem and Gender: Are Women Really at Risk?', *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology* 39, no. 3 (May 1, 2019): 189–99.
- 67 'An Issue Whose Time Has Come', *Journal of Neuroscience Research* 95, no. 1–2 (2017): 12.
- 68 Baron-Cohen, 'The Gendered Brain by Gina Rippon Review—Do Men and Women Have Different Brains?'; Cahill, 'An Issue Whose Time Has Come', 12; Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, x.
- 69 Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology*, 1–2.
- 70 Gross and Levitt, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*, 108, 110.

- 71 Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men*, 258.
- 72 Anne Fausto-Sterling, 'Building Two-Way Streets: The Case of Feminism and Science', *NWSA Journal* 4, no. 3 (1992): 336–49; Ruth Hubbard et al., 'Comments on Anne Fausto-Sterling's 'Building Two-Way Streets' [with Response]', *NWSA Journal* 5, no. 1 (1993): 45–81; Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*, 10.
- 73 John Gray, *Mars and Venus on a Date: A Guide for Navigating the 5 Stages of Dating to Create a Loving and Lasting Relationship*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), xii.
- 74 'The Extreme Male-Brain Theory of Autism', in *Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, ed. Helen Tager-Flusberg (MIT Press, 1999), 401–29.
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- 76 Ivanka Savic, Alicia Garcia-Falgueras, and Dick F. Swaab, 'Sexual Differentiation of the Human Brain in Relation to Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation', in *Progress in Brain Research*, ed. Ivanka Savic, vol. 186, Sex Differences in the Human Brain, Their Underpinnings and Implications (Elsevier, 2010), 44.
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- 78 Ehrhardt was a prolific scholar with and without Money, but she is often left out due to the Matilda Effect. Margaret W. Rossiter, 'The ~~Matthew~~ Matilda Effect in Science', *Social Studies of Science* 23, no. 2 (May 1, 1993): 325–41.
- 79 Davis, *Contesting Intersex*; Eliot, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How Small Differences Grow into Troublesome Gaps - and What We Can Do about It*.
- 80 Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*; John Colapinto, *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2000).
- 81 Davis, *Contesting Intersex*.
- 82 Positive outcomes are reviewed in Heino F. L. Meyer-Bahlburg, 'Gender Identity Outcome in Female-Raised 46,XY Persons with Penile Agensis, Cloacal Exstrophy of the Bladder, or Penile Ablation', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 34, no. 4 (August 1, 2005): 423–38. These outcomes should not be read to undermine the important critiques of unethical practice raised by intersex activists and scholars described by Davis, *Contesting Intersex*. I mention them only to demonstrate the highly selective telling of the John/Joan Story.
- 83 Bleier, 'Sex Differences Research: Science or Belief?', 150–52.
- 84 Barbara J. Risman, "Calling the Bluff of Value-Free Science," *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 4 (2001): 605–11.
- 85 Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*; Hines, *Brain Gender*.
- 86 Savic, Garcia-Falgueras, and Swaab, 'Sexual Differentiation of the Human Brain in Relation to Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation', 41.
- 87 Hugh Lytton and David M. Romney, 'Parents' Differential Socialization of Boys and Girls: A Meta-Analysis', *Psychological Bulletin* 109, no. 2 (March 1991): 267–96.
- 88 Thomas Eckes and Hanns M. Trautner, *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender* (Psychology Press, 2012).
- 89 For example: Emily W. Kane, "No Way My Boys Are Going to Be Like That!': Parents' Responses to Children's Gender Nonconformity',

- Gender & Society* 20, no. 2 (2006): 149–76; Taylor L. Field and Greggor Mattson, 'Parenting Transgender Children in PFLAG', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 2016, 1–17.
- 90 For a partial review of these complex processes, see Heidi M. Gansen and Karin A. Martin, 'Becoming Gendered', in *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*, ed. Barbara J. Risman, Carissa M. Froyum, and William J. Scarborough, *Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 83–93.
- 91 Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, 9; Cahill, 'Denying the Neuroscience of Sex Differences'; Hines, *Brain Gender*.
- 92 For a damning critique of this writing style, see Bleier, 'Sex Differences Research: Science or Belief?'
- 93 Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, 184–5.
- 94 Hines, *Brain Gender*, 228.
- 95 For critique, see Erin A. Cech, *The Passion Principle* (University of California Press, Forthcoming).
- 96 This motive does not explain his vitriolic review of Rippon's book, which is about the social rather than medical implications of biological sex. For more on sex difference motives and meanings in medicine, see Epstein, *Inclusion*.
- 97 Baron-Cohen says this to show he is different from Le Bon, the nineteenth-century scientist he criticises Rippon (2019) for bringing up. Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, 10.
- 98 For example Cahill, 'An Issue Whose Time Has Come'; Pinker, *The Blank Slate*.
- 99 Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*.
- 100 Diane F. Halpern, *Sex Differences in Cognitive Abilities*, 4th ed. (New York: Psychology Press, 2012); David Wechsler, *The Measurement and Appraisal of Adult Intelligence*, 4th ed. (Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins, 1958).
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# 19 Essentially a Lie

## Challenging Biological Essentialist Interpretations of Transgender Neurology

*Tristan Fehr*

Claims about intrinsic and permanent brain differences have long been used to perpetuate power and status disparities between social groups, including between women and men (Rippon, introduction). While assertions of women's neural inferiority to men are now widely rejected, the concept of the gendered brain has persisted in public thought. This assumption has come under recent debate, as some studies suggest that every brain consists of a unique 'mosaic' of feminine, masculine and shared brain qualities (Joel et al. 2015), and others counter that individual mosaics nonetheless follow predictable patterns corresponding to gender and/or sex (Chekroud et al. 2016). As a result, many unanswered questions remain surrounding the infallibility of interpreting the brain along monolithic sex or gender lines.

Ambiguities notwithstanding, the brain is an intriguing frontier of study for transgender and nonbinary communities who hope that its patterns will help them prove and affirm their own gender identities to medical and legal authorities that act as gatekeepers to their accessing basic rights. Even though trans people have been documented for millennia,<sup>1</sup> their modern existence is often plagued by continued demand for proof of their genders' legitimacy. On the line are access to housing, jobs, public accommodations, bathrooms, healthcare, identity documents accurately reflecting gender identity and safety from violence, among other concerns.<sup>2</sup> As the visibility and voice of trans communities have soared through globalisation and social media networking, the struggle for trans rights has faced an additional challenge in a retaliatory wave of far-right politics. Amid a surge of visibility of conservative factions such as the so-called Alt-Right and their public support by top public officials including the 45th president of the United States,<sup>3</sup> anti-LGBTQ hate crimes have increased while trans rights and legal protections have been stripped.<sup>4</sup>

Neuroscience evidence that trans people are who they say they are, therefore, is promising ammunition for trans people's struggle to exist and be recognised in a society and medical arena that can be overtly hostile to their survival. However, this information can also be recast to reinforce power imbalances and prevent trans people from accessing basic rights such as medical care. One recent review selectively cited trans

neuroscience research and proposed new treatments for gender dysphoria to ‘restore’ trans people to their sex assigned at birth (Gliske 2019). While the article was later corrected and the treatment recommendations were removed by the publisher<sup>5</sup>, the need for improved education surrounding trans neuroscience research remains. In order to prepare people to take down hate and bigotry, it pays to be informed—not only about the state of neuroscience studies containing trans people, but on how conservative factions respond to those studies, and how to respond to those conservative messages. It is through this lens, and for these causes, that this chapter is written.

### **Tools for Interpreting Trans Neuroscience Articles**

An overarching question shapes every study, and in studies of trans neuroscience, these questions often focus on the extent to which trans people’s brains reflect their gender identity or their sex assigned at birth. To this purpose, these studies frequently compare trans brains with those of cis people sharing their gender identity and/or sex assigned at birth. By contrast, other studies recruit trans populations to uncover how hormones influence the brain across sex and gender. Importantly, whatever question drives a research project determines participants’ recruitment across scales of age, sex assigned at birth, gender identity and sexual orientation. Diverse cross-sections of these variables between studies often prevent one-to-one comparisons of their results. For instance, a study investigating how gender identity relates to brain activation might contain both cis and trans adult women and men as comparison groups, while a study on the structural impact of hormones during brain development might exclusively track kids who identify as trans before and after they hit puberty or start hormones; in turn, both might include or neglect to account for sexual orientation as a variable. Although they would both generate new knowledge for the field of trans neuroscience, the applicability of each study’s results would be limited to the populations they contain.

Sociocultural biases are inherent to time and place of research, and pose further challenges for interpreting trans neuroscience research. Besides influencing which questions and tools researchers employ, these biases can complicate participant recruitment and data collection. As a minority population, the pool of trans participants available to researchers is shallow compared to cis-exclusive studies, and this selection problem is compounded by the process of controlling for variables—e.g. binary gender identity, sexual orientation, sex assigned at birth, hormonal status, age, handedness, family structure, education—within the population. Similarly, most studies implicitly or explicitly exclude those whose gender does not conform to a woman/man binary. Additionally, considering how a history of gatekeeping resources by the medical and research professionals may influence how trans people answer their

questions, it becomes clear that even the best-designed study is vulnerable to profound challenges to its generalisability.

Thus, when interpreting trans neuroscience studies, please resist the temptation to claim a single study's results prove any broad fact about the trans brain. The media loves sensationalising results, but that approach is not true to the science. Instead, consider individual studies in the context of previous studies' findings: did they ask the same questions? How might their differences between populations, techniques, timepoints and parts of the brain studied affect the congruence of their findings? No data exist in a vacuum—that is to say, only through consideration of the field as a whole can we begin to piece together the most likely story for what is truly going on in trans brains.

### **Common Words and Phrases**

For ease of comprehension and continuity, I normalise language between studies throughout this chapter. I refer to individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth as 'transgender' or 'trans' and 'nonbinary', and to individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth as 'cisgender' or 'cis'. I assign 'woman/girl' or 'man/boy' in conjunction with trans or cis labels based on the reported gender identity of individuals or groups, and use 'male' and 'female' to reference assigned sex, e.g. I translate 'a male-to-female transsexual' to 'trans woman'. I interpret sexuality through gender identity rather than assigned sex, e.g. a trans man described exclusively attracted to women is heterosexual. I call the medications trans people take to suppress their hormone production 'hormone blockers' and 'hormone suppressors', and refer to those who have never undergone hormone therapy as 'hormone therapy-naïve'.

Because gender has never been reliably identified in an animal model, its study relies on two methods that can be reliably used in humans: examining post-mortem brains, and peering into living brains with neuroimaging. Common to the latter is magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), a noninvasive brain scan technique. Researchers can query brain activity with functional MRI (fMRI), or examine brain structure through techniques that identify grey and white matter. Grey matter consists of neurons' cell bodies and synapses, the points of communication between neurons, while white matter consists of neurons' insulated axonal channels that transmit information between regions of grey matter. If the brain were a complex telephone system, the grey matter would be the mouthpieces and receivers where the conversation between neurons is spoken and then heard, while the white matter would be the long telephone lines carrying messages from one neuron to another. The MRI variant used to investigate white matter structure is called diffusion tensor imaging (DTI).

## Major Hypotheses on the Neuroscientific Origins of Gender Identity

To understand transgender neuroscience research, it is helpful to become familiar with common hypotheses that have helped drive and shape the research over decades. The first hypothesis posits that trans-spectrum genders emerge because trans people are born with the right brain in the wrong body. The ‘right brain, wrong body’ hypothesis, as I refer to this perspective, is in line with popular discourse and may have been shaped by trans people’s need to convince authorities that they are valid to gain access to rights and resources. This hypothesis has also been influenced by findings that sexual differentiation of the brain and body occurs in utero at distinct time points. However, this hypothesis fails to account for the environmental interactions with the brain, including through lived gender experiences, and applies most directly to people whose non-cis identities become apparent to them in early life.

An alternative hypothesis, and one that attempts to account for a role of the environment in gender development, is the ‘body self-perception’ hypothesis. The ‘body self-perception’ hypothesis of gender identity proposes that gender identity emerges as an interaction between developmental neurology in brain areas processing one’s relationship with one’s body, and environmental influences including lived experiences in and of one’s body. In this model, gender is a dynamic expression of the interaction between these elements. Accordingly, those who experience a trans-spectrum gender may find their differential relationship with their body represented within their brain.

## Structural Studies

### *Structural Differences in Postmortem Tissue*

In the 1990s, researchers turned to the brain for answers after ‘the genetics, gonads, genitalia, or hormone level of transsexuals ha[d] not, so far, produced any results that explain their status’ (Zhou et al. 1995). Studies had suggested that the brain and body might experience sexual differentiation at distinct time points in utero, revealing the hypothesis that a person’s body could develop as one sex while their brain developed as another. Researchers tested this hypothesis in two areas of the brain previously shown to be bigger in cis men than cis women: the core of the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis (BSTc) and the third interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH3). They found that in a small cohort (fewer than a dozen participants), trans women’s brains had cell counts and volumes similar to cis women and distinct from cis men, and one trans man’s values fell in the ranges of cis men (Zhou et al. 1995; Kruijver et al. 2000;

Garcia-Falgueras and Swaab 2008). When hormonal status and sexuality were not found to be driving factors of the effects they saw, it was concluded that these studies supported the ‘right brain, wrong body’ hypothesis of trans gender identities.

### *Grey Matter Differences*

#### *Studies of Hormone Therapy-Naïve Trans People*

When MRI techniques bloomed around the turn of the twenty-first century, trans neuroscience studies adopted the technique to answer how the grey matter of trans and cis people compares across genders and sexes—although the extent of grey matter differences between cis women and men remains a point of controversy to this day (Sanchis-Segura et al. 2019). Researchers who compared brain grey matter volumes between cis teenagers and trans teens who were either hormone therapy-naïve, on hormone blockers, or undergoing hormone therapy found that independent of hormonal status, trans brains only resembled cis brains sharing their gender identity in regions shown to differ between cis boys and girls (Hoekzema et al. 2015). Studies in hormone-naïve trans adults also found that grey matter volumes of trans women and men aligned with cis women and men, respectively, in regions demonstrating differences between cis groups (Zubiaurre-Elorza et al. 2013). Moreover, cisgender identity- and sex-aligning regions clustered separately in trans people when differences between cis groups weren’t accounted for (Simon et al. 2013). These results suggest that grey matter structure may be developmentally organised in trans people along the lines of cis people sharing their gender, giving some support for the ‘right brain, wrong body’ hypothesis.

Giving support to the ‘body self-perception’ hypothesis, grey matter in hormone therapy-naïve trans men aligned with cis women except in body self-perception areas, where their values were greater than both cis women and men (Manzouri et al. 2017). In a followup study including trans women and accounting for sexual orientation, trans brains’ elevated cortical thickness in regions related to body self-perception persisted (Manzouri and Savic 2018). These results suggest that a distinct and nuanced course of neural development in trans individuals may underlie some of the differences in relating to one’s body common to trans experiences.

#### *Longitudinal Grey Matter Changes throughout Hormone Therapy*

Trans participants who pursue hormonal means of gender affirmation are sometimes recruited to study the organisational-activational hypothesis, which proposes that sex hormones set up or organise the brain in



uterus and early life, and then activate the brain during and after puberty along these developmental patterns. However, some of these studies assume that trans brains are identical to cis brains at baseline, and do not compare trans groups to cis groups or track all groups over multiple timepoints. This limits their applicability to questions of gender identity development.

Limitations notwithstanding, studies have found that grey matter in trans people fluctuates with hormone therapy. Global cortical thickness increased in trans men and decreased in trans women (Zubiaurre-Elorza et al. 2014), while on the regional level, hormones decreased grey matter in trans men's Broca's and Wernicke's language areas (Hahn et al. 2016) and trans women's hippocampus—a structure important for learning and memory (Seiger et al. 2016). In addition, grey matter structure changed with hormone therapy in areas related to body perception in trans men (Mueller et al. 2016; Burke et al. 2017) and trans women (Spizzirri et al. 2018). Single timepoint comparisons, however, showed grey matter aligned with cis brains sharing assigned sex in regions related to emotional processing and reinforcement learning areas in trans women, and a region of motivation and reward processing in trans men (Mueller et al. 2016). Similar to studies of grey matter organisation, these results reveal that activation changes in grey matter in trans brains sometimes follow cis people along gender or sex lines, but other times follow a path that is entirely their own.

## *White Matter*

### *In Hormone Therapy-Naïve Trans People*

The state of white matter organisation relative to gender and sex in trans people naïve to hormone therapy is contested. While one study showed comparable white matter structure in trans and cis men across the brain (Rametti et al. 2011), others found white matter aligned according to gender in trans and cis people exclusively in a tract connecting brain regions important to body self-perception (Burke, Manzouri, and Savic 2017; Manzouri and Savic 2018). Yet another study found comparable white matter measurements across both gender and sex (Spizzirri et al. 2018), contrasting a study that found unique interhemispheric connectivity signatures indicating distinct white matter patterns in trans women and trans men (Hahn et al. 2015). While methodological differences like inclusion of homosexual participants (Rametti et al. 2011; Spizzirri et al. 2018) may explain some of the conflict between studies' findings, the current lack of a clear story in the literature precludes any conclusions about the impact of gender or sex in white matter of hormone-naïve trans people.

### ***White Matter Microstructure before and during Hormone Therapy***

Trans women and men appear to exhibit distinct activational effects of hormone therapy on white matter ultrastructure, but this conclusion is confounded by studies' methodological diversity. With hormone therapy, trans men demonstrated increased white matter coherence in regions related to spatial awareness and fine motor skills (Rametti et al. 2012), higher order language function (Hahn et al. 2016), visual processing (Burke et al. 2017) and body perception (Case et al. 2017). White matter structural correlations with hormone levels were also reported in trans men (Kranz et al. 2017). Yet, while trans women with at least two years of hormone therapy aligned with cis groups per sex and not gender in volume of their corpus callosum (Mueller et al. 2016), a communications hub between right and left lobes of the brain, changes in the corpus callosum's structure were nonetheless evident in trans women over their first few months of hormone therapy (Kranz et al. 2017). In turn, another study found no white matter differences between cis women and men and trans women who averaged three years on hormone therapy (Spizzirri et al. 2018). The lack of coherence in findings between these studies is confounded by dissimilarities in their study design. Disparities in use of cis men and women as comparison groups, longitudinal measurements and consideration of white matter fluctuations that occur in cis women and men (Kranz et al. 2017) prevent any unified conclusions from being drawn, while underscoring the field's need for more research.

## **Functional Studies**

### ***In Children and Adolescents***

Brain activity of trans adolescents on hormone blockers typically followed patterns of cis youth sharing their gender and departed from cis youth sharing their assigned sex. This pattern was observed in frontal activation of trans boys during a mental rotation task (Burke et al. 2016), in trans girls' and boys' hypothalamic response to smelling the steroid hormone androstenedione (Burke et al. 2014), in trans teens' activation trends in a speech production region during a verbal fluency task (Soleman et al. 2013) and even at rest in trans girls' and boys' sensorimotor and 'mind wandering' networks (Nota et al. 2017). At odds with this tendency were studies that found distinctive activation of a resting state visual network in trans girls (Nota et al. 2017) and sex-congruent activity in trans teens during an executive functioning task (Staphorsius et al. 2015). By contrast, prepubertal trans boys and girls showed, respectively, intermediate and sex-consistent hypothalamic responses to androstenedione (Burke et al. 2014), while hormone

blocker-naïve trans youth showed activity patterns intermediate to cis boys and girls during an executive functioning task (Staphorsius et al. 2015). These results imply that gender-congruent organisation of the trans brain may be ongoing, even up to the point of puberty, when it may be masked by activational effects of a gender-incongruent hormonal balance.

## *In Adults*

### *Trans Individuals Naïve to Hormone Therapy*

Functional neuroscience studies in hormone therapy-naïve trans adults demonstrate that trans people process their bodies and voices differently than cis adults independent of hormone therapy's activational effects. Following a study showing that trans men think about—rather than perceive—their bodies differently than cis men and women do (Feusner et al. 2016), trans men showed weaker connectivity in resting-state self-body identification networks than cis men and women (Feusner et al. 2017), including between brain areas moderating body perception and ownership (Manzouri et al. 2017). This pattern was recapitulated in trans women and men even when considering sexual orientation as a covariate (Manzouri and Savic 2018). Then, trans women exhibited distinct activation patterns compared to cis men and women in regions associated with vocal identity and emotional processing during a vocal processing task (Junger et al. 2014), while trans men showed activational differences from cis women in a region related to higher order language processing and internal body awareness (Smith et al. 2018). These results suggest that environmental elements of gender, including a person's embodied experiences, may work together with neurological substrates of gender differently in trans and cis populations.

### *Trans Individuals during Hormone Therapy*

Neurological changes have been linked to hormonal shifts in trans adults across diverse functions. Hormone level changes correlate with molecular signalling changes in trans men and women, shown by altered serotonin receptor binding (Kranz et al. 2014), and with language-related changes in trans men, shown by enhanced resting state functional connectivity in Broca's and Wernicke's language areas (Hahn et al. 2016). Yet, in the face of evidence that resting state brain activity correlated with hormone levels trans men (Mueller et al. 2016a), hormone levels failed to correlate with trans men's reduced brain activation compared to cis women while viewing pictures of positive affect (Soleman et al. 2016). It is clear that hormones are only one aspect of the activational story.

Similarly, trans women showed decreased connectivity compared to cis people at baseline, but longitudinal hormone therapy led to rescue of connectivity in areas important to emotional processing (Spies et al. 2016). The emerging relationship between hormone therapy and brain plasticity is thus revealed to be a complex play of direct effects and indirect influencing.

Functional studies in adults on hormone therapy also added to the evidence of neural distinctions in body self-processing networks between trans and cis people. Trans men had weaker resting state connectivity in body awareness-related regions than cis women and men before hormone therapy, and showed strengthened connectivity in these regions with hormone therapy (Burke et al. 2017). Relatedly, trans men showed altered activation compared to cis women in regions of sensory and emotional processing during chest stimulation, and these effects were independent of hormone therapy status (Case et al. 2017). Together, these results indicate that trans people relate to their bodies differently than cis people, both in sensory and reflective capacities.

Following this evidence, it is clear that the complex relationship between gender, the brain and the environment is not sufficiently described by the 'right brain, wrong body' hypothesis. In turn, the 'body self-perception' hypothesis has some traction within the literature, and reflects gender may be based on a nuanced interplay brain and environment. However, the complexity of that model may produce interpretive ambiguity, and thus is low hanging fruit for rejection by conservative people and those already in doubt regarding the validity of trans experiences.

## **The Response by Conservative Factions**

One doctor who responded to studies of the neuroscience of trans people and is heavily cited among Alt-Right communities is Paul R. McHugh. McHugh was the director of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science and Henry Phipps Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University from 1975 to 2001. Importantly, he headed the decision to shut down the transgender health centre at Johns Hopkins in 1979 based on his belief that medically treating transgender communities was doing more harm than good. In 2016 McHugh published a 143-page, non peer-reviewed self-described 'opinion piece for the general public' ('Anti-LGBT Doc Paul McHugh: I Will Not Be Silenced' Daily Beast) that included 35 pages of his interpretation of sex, gender and neuroscience of both (Mayer and McHugh 2016). Within this text, McHugh denied the neurological basis of gender and transgender identities, instead suggesting their exclusively environmental origins. The reaction to this article was swift and widespread. Medical communities petitioned Johns Hopkins to distance itself from the piece, while conservative audiences lauded its conclusions. While there are numerous

tools and fallacies used to advance the article's contents, the three discussed here are favouring simplicity over complexity, biological essentialism and misrepresentation of scientific methodology.

### *Simple versus Complex: The Hook*

Social psychology studies have revealed an ideological divide related to simplicity and complexity between politically conservative and liberal people. Compared to people with liberal viewpoints, conservative people favour simplicity (Wilson 1973) and cognitive closure (Wilson 1990), are intolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity (Jost et al. 2003) and are more likely to perceive and react strongly to negative stimuli (Hibbing et al. 2014). McHugh's article caters to conservative readers by providing simple explanations for gender, and capitalises on their emotional response by painting gender complexity as a threat to the gender binary status quo.

McHugh's complicity with simplification emerges in his introduction, long before he touches any neuroscience. When McHugh describes the growing cultural understanding of gender's nuances—including transgender and nonbinary identities—as 'fluid and plastic', he links it to the 'overthrowing of traditional gender roles' that he opines leads us to 'lose any common set of criteria for defining what gender distinctions mean' (Mayer and McHugh, 88). By focusing on destabilisation, McHugh paints trans people's mere existence as threatening his readers' genders. Realistically, genders beyond a strict natal binary are widely recognised across time and cultures (*Evolution's Rainbow*), and do not eclipse people with binary genders, who are free to retain their gender identities. Instead, the issue at hand remains

how to create a world in which those who understand their gender and their desire to be nonnormative can live and thrive not only without the threat of violence from the outside but without the pervasive sense of their own unreality.

(Butler 219)

Far from cultural collapse, the aim of reconstructing—or deconstructing—gender is to shape gender cultural norms to reflect reality and support trans people's survival rather than fight it.

Yet, by founding his chapter on a fight to save traditional interpretations of gender, McHugh invites his conservative readers to champion gender from the narrow lens of who impregnates and who gestates offspring. Even as McHugh employs examples from 'the diversity of the animal kingdom' and 'the diversity of human behavior', he boils down extensively documented (*Evolution's Rainbow*) variations in animal and human biology and gender to sexual reproduction: 'the scientific definition of

biological sex is, for almost all human beings, clear, binary, and stable, reflecting an underlying biological reality that is not contradicted by exceptions to sex-typical behavior, and cannot be altered by surgery or social conditioning' (Mayer and McHugh, 93). By evoking the authority of science and biology and the absolutism of terms like 'clear, binary, and stable', McHugh is able to sidestep the admission that 'almost all' people does not mean everyone. This gives him space to ignore trans and nonbinary populations, as well as natural spectra of sex and gender, that exist outside of his narrow definition, and establishes the hierarchical authority of the body for use during later discussions of gender in the brain.

McHugh also emphasises that compared to his definition of sex, '*gender identity* is a more subjective attribute' (93). While this interpretation agrees with individuals' unique experiences of gender, McHugh unfortunately conflates subjectivity with choice. McHugh claims that transgender people 'choose to identify as a gender different from their biological sex' (93) and that 'gender identity can be a complex and burdensome issue for those who choose (or have others choose for them) a gender identity opposite their biological sex' (94). In these claims, he throws the burden of blame for societal issues on trans people, and undermines trans people's authority on their own genders.

Once this power dynamic is established, McHugh switches tack to another philosophy: biological essentialism.

### ***Biological Essentialism: The Twist***

As an update to Plato's classical essentialism in which categories such as 'man' and 'woman' have conceptual, 'essential', true forms that the physical world imperfectly aspires to, modern essentialism incorporates advancements in scientific understanding. Essentialism is currently used to indicate 'a belief that certain phenomena', including sex and sexual determination, 'are natural, inevitable, universal, and biologically determined' (DeLamater and Hyde 1998), and are indelibly linked with the binary sex assignment made as early as conception. Via essentialism, a person's sex has 'a specific essence that outlives all changes and which defines its true nature' (Voell 2013). However, the staidness of essentialist philosophy and its rejection of categorical fluidity are shortcomings explored through developmental psychology.

Essentialism in psychology manifests in childhood as 'a 'placeholder' notion' whereby 'one can believe that a category possesses an essence without knowing what the essence is' (Gelman 2005). Children will perceive traits of one member of a category to apply to other members of a category, and to be innately driven. For instance, a child may see a superficial trait of a person categorised as a girl, such as wearing a dress, as innate to the category of 'girl'. They may then use essentialist reasoning to conclude that all girls wear dresses, and 'assume that a boy that

wears a dress will become a girl' (Heyman and Giles 2006). However, by nature, 'many essentialist explanations provide little in the way of concrete mechanisms', and in fact are 'not much of an explanation at all' (Heyman and Giles 2006). It is perhaps in light of these shortcomings that use of the term 'essentialism' is rarely self-championed, and instead is 'generally used by those who are opposed to it, not by those who practice it' (DeLamater and Hyde 1998). Despite the stigma, essentialist practices remain prevalent across ages and society, and are frequent within McHugh's texts.

McHugh's essentialism operates on three central tenets: '(a) a belief in underlying true forms or essences; (b) a discontinuity between different forms rather than continuous variation; and (c) constancy, that is, the absence of change over time' (DeLamater and Hyde 1998).

### *True Forms and Essences*

A sexual binary rooted in reproductive biology and dominant to other gender identification systems is at the core of McHugh's essentialism. McHugh states that 'universally, the male of the species fertilizes the egg cells provided by the female of the species', and thereby crafts a 'conceptual basis for sex roles [that] is binary and stable' (Mayer and McHugh, 89)—even though arguably this concept's stability derives from ignoring evidence of more complex spectra of sex and gender. Yet, dismissing evidence of complexity is necessary for McHugh to promote his essentialist concept. When McHugh states that 'the ability to recognize exceptions to sex-typical behavior relies on an understanding of maleness and femaleness that is independent of these stereotypical sex-appropriate behaviors' (89), he invokes ideals of male and female 'true forms' independent of real-life conditions. McHugh maintains that his sex role binary supersedes reproductive system variations, behavioural designations and other observable manifestations of gender and sex, implying that 'understanding the reproductive system and the reproduction process' has more value than 'arbitrary' scientific evidence (90). Forget data; through essentialism, interpretations of a given reproductive system's 'intended purpose' are enough to cement an individual into a male or female category that designates their gender for them.

The same supremacist conceptualisation of reproductive system and sexual roles holds when McHugh appraises neuroscience data, especially when the data support a complex reading of sex and gender and allow for gender self-designation. McHugh's first direct reference to the brain establishes its inferiority to sexual anatomy while hypothesising about gender dysphoria's origins: 'primary sex characteristics such as genitalia develop normally while secondary sex characteristics associated with the brain develop along the lines of the opposite sex' (97). McHugh blocks arguments of gender supported by neuroscience data by downgrading

the brain and favouring sex organs—upon which reproductive intention, and thus sex assignment, can be written. This serves as another step in preserving McHugh's 'your sex is your gender' status quo—a standpoint which previously fed McHugh's decision to shut down Johns Hopkins' gender affirming surgeries in 1979 (McHugh, 'Surgical Sex').

### *Discontinuity over Continuous Variation*

Through his insistence on a binary reading of reproductive biology, McHugh actively ignores naturally occurring spectra of other biological systems even as he references them. As an example, within genetics, McHugh declares that human 'males have XY chromosomes and females have XX chromosomes' (Mayer and McHugh, 89) and he dismisses 'genetic abnormalities' as 'rare phenomena' (97). Not only does McHugh fail here in capturing the wide array of viable XY permutations that exist in humans (Fausto-Hubbard), but he falls prey to classifying X and Y as female and male 'sex chromosomes'—itself a social construct rather than an objective truth dictating sex or gender (Richardson 201).

When McHugh assigns gender based on a presumed genetic binary, he follows a centuries-old essentialist tradition: 'throughout the twentieth century, and now in the twenty-first, geneticists have used sex chromosome studies to argue that there are new, additional, or "deeper" differences between males and females than once thought' (Richardson 202). The hidden truths of gender that essentialists promise lie in genetics are also based on missing data. Chromosomal karyotyping remains rare, and most individuals' assignment of XX or XY makeups derives from assumptions based on other cues— even superficial traits like 'large hands, prominent Adam's apples, and thick facial features' (McHugh, 'Surgical Sex'). This essentialist reading of genetics also denies the environment's powerful role in modulating gene expression via epigenetic actions. By omitting evidence of the nuanced interplay between genes and the environment, McHugh preserves his 'biology is destiny' myth.

The historical and social trails behind assigning binary sex to physiology have been traced at length through multifold contexts, of which genetics (Richardson), anatomy and hormones (Fausto-Hubbard), neuroscience (Rippon, Jordan-Young) and intersex conditions (Davis) are a few examples. McHugh blindly carves forward when he forces a binary onto people with intersex conditions, describing people who 'possess both male and female gonads and sex organs' (Mayer and McHugh, 97), or lack 'receptors for male sex hormones, leading them to develop the secondary sex characteristics of females, rather than males' (96). Through perseverating on a male/female binary, McHugh ignores research that 'approximately 1.7% of all live births do not conform to a



Platonic ideal of absolute sex chromosome, gonadal, genital, and hormonal dimorphism' (Blackless et al. 2000). This erasure of the ranges of human sex and gender in favour of a female/male binary is statistically akin to dismissing the existence of redheaded people in favour of blonde and brunette people—and equally as absurd. Yet, perpetuating an idealistic binary, even when it is divorced from reality, is a step McHugh must take for his essentialist views to survive.

### *Constancy over Time*

As the final cornerstone of his essentialism, McHugh portrays his female and male true forms as eternal and irrefutable, first by refusing to validate gender transitions. McHugh's language concerning real and imagined transgender people tethers them to their sex assigned at birth, whether he is inventing 'a biological male who identifies himself as a female' (Mayer and McHugh, 95), or describing an 'FtM twin [who] exhibited gender-nonconforming behavior early' and was attracted 'to other girls' (99). McHugh construes transitioning as a choice, and therefore temporary, with language like 'identifies himself' and 'exhibited gender-nonconforming behavior'. The implied spontaneity of these phrases demonstrates McHugh's devaluation of gender self-proclamations, and contrasts the worth that he assigns reproductive biology. McHugh highlights that valuation by emphasising that the latter individual's 'twin sister was married and the mother of seven children' (99)—implying that that individual's 'true form' persists despite their transition. By later staking transgender people's 'biological gender' against their 'preferred gender' (101) while discussing neuroscience results, McHugh further signals his view that gender identities are temporary creations secondary to steadfast reproductive biology.

McHugh's description of gender notably stands in direct opposition to language used by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the largest association of scientists and psychologists in the United States and a widely respected authority in psychiatry. The APA accepts the distinction of a person's gender identity from their 'initial assignment as male or female at birth' (What Is Gender Identity?), contradicting McHugh's essentialist argument that binary sex as assigned at birth is the first and ultimate authority on a person's gender. In turn, McHugh can only imagine the divergence of a person's sex and gender following extreme environmental interventions like childhood abuse (Mayer and McHugh, 99), maladaptive psycho-social traits (102), family dynamics (107) or developmental issues (108)—arguments also historically used to pathologise homosexuality as a mental disorder. The discussion of these factors indicates the lengths McHugh is willing to go to defame gender identity when it shifts beyond his constructed constant of reproductive biology as sex.

In all, the biological essentialism that McHugh wields is myopic by design. Even as he cites researchers stating that transgender identities are 'likely to be associated with multiple genetic, epigenetic, developmental and experiential influences' (99), McHugh rejects views of gender identity that contradict its establishment by the reproductive biology that he infers from sex assigned at birth and a collection of other physiological traits. However, McHugh's painstaking argument outlining exactly what concepts reproductive biology consists of (sperm and eggs), signifies (impregnation and gestation) and intends (producing offspring) regardless of the presence and experience of these traits in people's actual lived lives remains, ironically, as constructed as the brain-based methods of determining gender that he aims to undermine.

### *Spin and Procedural Criticism: Attacking the Scientific Method*

After staring down the long barrel of evidence of differences between trans and cis people's brains, McHugh performs a series of rhetorical gymnastics to manoeuvre and misconstrue those findings. Tactics he uses to cast doubt on research he cites are downplaying the evidence through research method double standards, discrediting studies through selective statistical interpretations and dismissing conclusions through the perfectionist fallacy.

### *Research Method Double Standards*

As he resists validating studies showing the confluence of neuroscience and gender identity, McHugh repeatedly appeals to study size. Notwithstanding his own use of case studies (92), McHugh describes a study as 'limited by its small sample size' (98), downplays another because 'with a sample size of one, this study's statistical power is virtually zero' (101) and claims the whole field of gender identity neuroscience is 'many small studies' (98) despite citing a study with participants numbering hundreds. If the field consisted of the scant four studies that McHugh cites, the numbers might actually be a problem. However, with more than two decades of research history and dozens of trans neuroscience research papers illustrating the complex structural and functional coding of gender in trans brains, the 'many small studies' begin to add up to highlight the tiredness of this argument.

McHugh also chastises control group limitations to degrade study findings and advance his ideals. He bemoans one study's omission of 'a control group of transgender persons who desired to have sex-reassignment surgery but did not receive it' (110), with the ethically alarming implication that denying people potentially lifesaving medical interventions is justifiable for the sake of experimental design. By offhandedly ignoring

the stakes of healthcare decisions, McHugh endorses upholding the status quo of trans oppression in the name of science as not a big concern. McHugh's advocacy for trans erasure via control groups also surfaces when he cites a study that relies on 'matched heterosexual controls' (101)—when the sexuality of the transgender individuals is not considered as a variable at all. Peering through McHugh's smokescreen of caring for scientific design reveals that he only truly cares about smart design when it favours cis people—regardless of the fallout for trans people.

Another point of duplicity is McHugh's support for longitudinal studies. In theory, McHugh champions gold-standard study design: 'The only definitive way to establish epidemiological causality between a brain feature and a trait (especially one as complex as gender identity) is to conduct prospective, longitudinal, preferably randomly sampled and population-based studies' (103). He continues that to not do so 'severely limits our ability to understand causal relationships' (102) of gender identity. Yet, when a study using 30 years of trans population data violates McHugh's expectations by failing to indicate adverse outcomes of transitioning that would validate his and others' refusing trans populations medical care, McHugh blames timelines. To annul the negative results, McHugh declares that 'there were of course fewer years of data available at the time the study was conducted' for the dataset and suggests, on no evidence, that 'the later group may in time come to resemble the elevated risks of the earlier group' (111). However, McHugh's conclusion that 'sex-reassignment surgery may not rectify the comparatively poor health outcomes associated with transgender populations in general'—despite the negative results and in direct contradiction of the study's conclusion that without transitioning, 'things might have been even worse' (111)—indicates that he only accepts findings that enforce his bias. Calling for research design improvements turns out to be another feint masking McHugh's refusal to recognise the validity of transgender people's identities.

### *Selective Statistical Interpretations*

McHugh uses a selective reading of statistics as another way to promote his biases. He rejects significant results supporting neural representation of gender identity, suggesting they 'do not sufficiently support the notion that transgender individuals have brains more similar to their preferred gender' (101) and are 'insufficient to demonstrate that brain structure is a cause, rather than an effect' (104) of gender identity. The latter point, of course, is only a concern for gatekeepers like McHugh who do not accept trans people's authority on their genders, instead demanding—in true biological essentialist fashion—that they provide physiological proof of gender before he treats them with humanity. By contrast, McHugh has no problem inventing significance for results

he likes, i.e. results that group trans people with their sex assigned at birth. He attempts to overwrite null findings contradicting his beliefs by declaring that ‘the values, however, were typically closer to the males (that is, to those that shared their biological sex)’ (100). These rhetorical tricks show that McHugh does not actually value the scientific method as a tool for understanding the world, and that his true interests lie in appropriating science to spread his anti-trans dogma. Unfortunately, by doing so McHugh telegraphs to his followers that science is a tool best used to confirm ideas rather than uncover new knowledge about how the world works.

### *The Perfectionist Fallacy*

When McHugh can no longer minimise neuroscience findings supporting gender identity in the brain, he submits them to an impossibly high value threshold via the perfectionist fallacy: a logical flaw that any proposal or claim failing to perfectly meet acceptance criteria must be discarded. For example, by describing needing ‘prohibitively large’ sample sizes or current studies’ ‘inherent and ineradicable methodological limitations’ (103), McHugh employs fatalistic language to communicate that he views any research attempts to characterise gender in the trans brain as futile.

Applying his absolutist metric to evaluating gender identity as a whole, McHugh also posits that ‘biology only helps in predicting whether the individual is transgender if it can improve on the original guess that the person is not transgender’ (104). From this reasoning, McHugh deduces that moving the dial on the prediction that trans people’s neuroscience differs from cis people is ‘very difficult for a rare trait such as being transgender, because the probability of that prediction being correct is already very high’ (105). This suggests that McHugh would only believe in traits with a high population frequency or clear-cut etiology.

Imagine if McHugh applied this philosophy to a condition like depression. Only about 7% of adults in the United States experience a major depressive episode in a given year (NIMH, Major Depression), meaning that the best prediction for a single adult is that they are not depressed. Moreover, the traits that people exhibit when depressed are multifold, and depression’s etiology is also understood to be multifactorial—leaving healthcare professionals without a single-factor litmus test for depression. By McHugh’s idealist criteria, then, it may be nigh impossible to establish that a person is experiencing depression, and this lack of clarity would be enough to warrant refusing the patient access to medical treatments for their depression. McHugh might subsequently focus on treating the ‘psychological and social causes’ (Mayer and McHugh, 105) of the depression, even though many patients respond best to medication or a combination of medication and psychotherapy.

Contrary to McHugh's faulty beliefs, we know that trans people's gender identity is not a manifestation of mental illness, but a facet of human biological variation exhibiting historical and statistical regularity. What McHugh fails to grasp through his absolutist perspectives on gender is that even though the messy nature of biology can lead even the best designed studies to complex results, these results nonetheless collectively offer us a chance to start to understand how the brain and our lived experiences interact—and we would be quite closeminded to let that opportunity pass us by.

### **How to Respond to McHugh and Alt-Right Interpretations: Handling Complexity**

A main challenge to expressing the state of transgender neuroscience research is encapsulating the complexity of the findings into a deliverable message, especially given some of your audience's likely tendency and need to simplify. As is also present in McHugh's discourse, a common response to the literature is to dismiss findings from studies on trans neuroscience for a lack of clarity and consensus. One interpretation may be that without definitive evidence that transgender people's brains match the brains of cis people who share their gender identities, there is no reason to treat transgender identities as valid. The flip side of that message is that without definitive evidence that transgender people's brains lock to the neurological patterns of the sex they were assigned at birth, there is no reason to treat transgender identities as invalid. It may suffice to say that brains are a complex organ, that influences on brain development are numerous and that it is unrealistic to use individual variables like genes or external anatomy as means for classifying people's genders.

Another oversimplified rallying point is casting nature and nurture as a debate. Not even in laboratories do the two work in isolation from each other. Advancements in scientific understanding in human epigenetics, microbiome research and other fields continue to show the indisputable interplay of how environment and biology mutually shape each other. Likewise oversold is the likelihood that one individual experience or genetic component independently has a significant, profound impact on a human's brain and behaviour. There is no magic gene, hormone, life experience or other individual factor shown to determine sex or gender, and it seems unlikely that additional research will uncover a single factor as the exclusive determinant. Instead, as the story tends to go, a compendium of diverse factors can each have a say in the makeup of a person's sex and gender—factors that may be hormonal, genetic, epigenetic, social, linguistic. When someone references nature and nurture as distinctly categorical or hierarchical, you may therefore kindly correct their point of view since these factors are at a constant interplay, even before conception.

Teaching complexity when simplicity is both favoured and highly instilled requires creativity, patience and grace. To avoid blocking out new information in favour of the stability of former—albeit outdated—knowledge, one approach that could be tried is borrowed from improvisational comedy: the ‘yes, and’ maxim. Using this process, establish a point of commonality, such as the need for more research, and derive your arguments tangentially from that line of thought—for example, leading into the research findings that are currently available. Another possible point of approach derives from hostage negotiations: people in a defensive position find it easier to say yes after they have already said no.<sup>6</sup> Get the other party to say no first by posing a question that you know they will disagree with, and they may be more receptive to your points later on.

Another useful tool may be to distil your message down into a single sentence or small paragraph. In most cases, concise messages are most desirable and easiest to digest. For example, you could say ‘the field of transgender neuroscience as a whole supports trans people’s brains as distinct from the cisgender sex they were assigned at birth, and as aligning with cisgender brains with which they identify’. Preparing similar messages using concise language may help your audience digest your points, especially those who favour simplicity over complexity. By focusing on conclusions and consensus across studies, you may also avoid providing contrarians with tools for demanding justifications of individual studies’ minute details. For those conversants desiring direct evidence, consider providing an index of resources to which you can direct them. Many people may not know to reference more than a few articles. Giving them the tools and the onus of research may help you stay focused on your own messaging.

Finally, considering the breadth of research methods in this field of study, you may encounter proper and improper opportunities to discuss the caveats of the research. This may include the continued complexity of the findings, the importance of hypothesis-driven research and responsible statistical analysis. However, note that your engagement with the Alt-Right may not be rooted in logic or measured discussion, and you may not find a fair audience for reception and interpretation of your points. The more discrete you can keep your points, therefore, the more productive you may find your conversations.

## Notes

- 1 While there have been numerous studies on the histories of trans people, much more is still needed. Some studies include: John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston,

- MA: Beacon Press, 1996); Patrick Califia-Rice, *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 1997); Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson, eds., *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Sherry M. Velasco, *The Lieutenant Nun: Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire and Catalina de Erauso*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Paul Julian Smith, *The Body Hispanic: Gender and Sexuality in Spanish and Spanish American Literature*, Clarendon Paperbacks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); Thomas Alan Abercrombie, *Passing to América: Antonio (Née María) Yta's Transgressive, Transatlantic Life in the Twilight of the Spanish Empire* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018); C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2017).
- 2 HRC <https://web.archive.org/web/20190727011222/https://www.hrc.org/resources/understanding-the-transgender-community>.
  - 3 <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/08/donald-trumps-ties-to-alt-right-white-supremacists-are-extensive.html>.
  - 4 See: <https://web.archive.org/blog/web/20190913145959/https://www.hrc.org/blog/new-fbi-data-shows-increased-reported-incidents-of-anti-lgbtq-hate-crimes-i> and <https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration>.
  - 5 <https://web.archive.org/web/20191217042844/https://www.eneuro.org/content/6/6/ENEURO.0513-19.2019>
  - 6 <https://web.archive.org/web/20171004151745/https://www.inc.com/will-yakowicz/3-keys-to-bargaining-with-anyone-according-to-an-fbi-hostage-negotiator.html>, Freakonomics episode with Chris Voss.

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## 20 The Country of the Future No More

*Lauri Tähinen*

In April 2017, congressman Jair Bolsonaro took the stage at the Club Hebraica of Rio de Janeiro, an institution whose founders in the 1950s included many Holocaust survivors. Bolsonaro's appearance at a leading cultural and social institution exposed divisions within the city's and country's Jewish community. Jewish religious leaders and activists had been leading opponents of the military dictatorship (1964–1985), and his appearance at the club triggered protests and lamentations. Yet, Bolsonaro's vocal support of Israel—having been baptised in the Jordan River—and connections to leading right-wing Israeli politicians also appealed to some Brazilian Jews who often share the frustrations of other wealthier white Brazilians regarding crime and public order. Public security, together with corruption, would become the leading theme of Bolsonaro's successful run for the presidency in 2018.

At the club, he declared that once he becomes president 'everyone will have a firearm in their home and there will be not one centimetre demarcated for an Indian reserve or for a quilombo'—a maroon community founded by descendants of escaped slaves known as quilombolas.<sup>1</sup> Bolsonaro had visited such a community and found that 'the lightest Afro-descendant there weighed seven arrobas', one arroba equalling a bushel of 15 kilograms, an agricultural term used for evaluating cattle. Bolsonaro continued his remarks by claiming that a quilombola is 'no longer good for even breeding'. Yet, he did find someone to praise as well; by contrast, Bolsonaro offered the Japanese as a 'race' with appropriate shame and who you never find begging. It was vintage Bolsonaro, focused on dividing Brazilians, and offering a particularly bleak, fin-de-siècle—yes, the one over a hundred years ago—reading of Brazilian race relations. Just as he divided Cariocas (as Rio's inhabitants are known), he went on to divide Brazilians, e.g. with contested readings of the years of dictatorship, and, finally, in 2019 took his talent for divisiveness on to the global stage.

This essay is not really about Jair Bolsonaro, but about how his emergence forces a critical reassessment of some cherished narratives about Brazil. It is an essay about a peculiarly Brazilian eschatology

focused on the millenarianism of the present. Before we had the Country of the Future—a phrase known to all—, there was the history of the future, one of many prophetic discourses in colonial Brazil. Therefore, this distillation is, necessarily, about the respective weight given to the future and the past. Its argument is that all the future talk was never truly about progress—much less order, to cite that other Positivist emblem from the Brazilian flag—but about the End of History, before it was even a thing, or as framed by Francis Fukuyama. The Country of the Future was about leaping from the present into the future with the levity rather than the weight of the past. Thus, this journey is structured as one from the present through the future into the past—the surest route for making one’s way from the past into the present and onwards.

Brazil had been living through the politics of inevitability, at least since the age of Getúlio Vargas in the early-to-mid-twentieth century—and in some important ways even earlier through millenarianism. According to this line of thought Brazil’s transformation is not only inevitable but it is also imminent and immanent. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and his presidency, which ended with an approval rating of 87%, was the final and, perhaps, most important vehicle of this transformation. Timothy Snyder provides the language of inevitability—and eternity—, and this classification captures well what has happened in Brazil before, during and, most fatefully, after Lula.

The collapse of the politics of inevitability ushers in another experience of time: *the politics of eternity*. Whereas inevitability promises a better future for everyone, eternity places one nation at the center of a cyclical story of victimhood. Time is no longer a line into the future, but a circle that endlessly returns the same threats from the past. Within inevitability, no one is responsible because we all know that the details will sort themselves out for the better; within eternity, no one is responsible because we all know that the enemy is coming no matter what we do. Eternity politicians spread the conviction that government cannot aid society as a whole, but can only guard against threats. Progress gives way to doom.<sup>2</sup>

Before we move on to the doom, let us pause for a moment to contemplate what a historian of Eastern Europe is doing in this essay, by providing formulae for the interpretation of Brazil in a book with ‘Russia, Europe, America’ on its cover. While Snyder is no scholar of the Land of the Holy Cross—as Brazil was known before the crude, materialist moniker based on a prized export replaced the older name—he is certainly a leading interpreter of the vast agricultural polities created in the aftermath of serfdom and in a complicated relationship to Western

modernity. What both Brazil and Russia share with the American South is the experience of chattel slavery and serfdom well into the second half of the nineteenth century—all legacies of the long tail of Atlantic and Eurasian feudalism, powered by the logic of an emerging capitalist economy.

The connection between Brazil and Russia—at least as much in its imperial-orthodox as in its Marxist-Leninist variety—was one that Gilberto Freyre, the father of Lusotropicalism, was fond of highlighting. Perhaps his most celebrated formulation of the proximity flows from analogue to hybridity:

Another transition people between Europe and Africa, the Russian is now revealing to the world a new and in some ways successful type of social organization that includes miscegenation (especially Euro-Asiatic race mixture) among its solutions of social problems. In more than one aspect of its ethnic and social situation, Brazil reminds one of Russia; it is almost an American Russia.<sup>3</sup>

This formulation is based on the Patten lectures that Freyre delivered at Indiana University in late 1944 in an attempt to draw Brazil and the United States closer to each other. Yet, in that process he was forced to recognise many issues that divided the two countries—including race—and, in the process, he almost unnoticeably also built a bridge between Russia and Brazil. It is now Snyder who completes the triangle for us with his study of the twenty-first-century relationship between Russia and the United States and engages in something quite akin to Freyrean parallel construction—a fraught yet rewarding exercise.

Bolsonaro is a departure from the traditional narratives about Brazil and the future, ones in which Brazil's multiracialism and hybridity positioned it, at one extreme, as humankind's saviour. They often intermingled with narratives about why the country had not turned out 'right' and one reason was often found in Brazilian flexibility. The introduction of classical liberal political economy intermingled with slavery, during the court of Dom João IV in Rio de Janeiro (1808–1820) and the early days of the Brazilian empire, and this was evident, for example, in the thought and praxis of the political economist José da Silva Lisboa. Thus, while Brazilian history offers many examples for many ends, it does not offer a serviceable twentieth-century fascism, one thoroughly and openly committed to racial hierarchy. The military dictatorship (1964–1985) that Bolsonaro celebrates was one that espoused immanent Lusotropicalism, a multiracial force for good, whatever the structured realities of a post-slavery society may have been. It was an ideology focused on uniqueness and, ultimately, ameliorative race relations in former Portuguese colonies, providing the foundation for the Country of the Future and the ground on which the

politics of inevitability could rest. Bolsonaro has been willing to drop all of this and turn the country 'right' by turning it right. Where should Brazil be taken next?

Before there was Bolsonaro—through Getúlio Vargas and democracy, dictatorship and Lula—Brazil was living its own End of History for decades, at least since the 1930s or 1940s. This was enabled, amongst other things, through the inevitable politics of Lusotropicalism and, now with Bolsonaro's politics of eternity, Brazil has crashed into history, forcing us to dissect what exactly that label, 'the future', and its association with the country of Brazil has hidden in plain sight for decades—or, perhaps, even longer. Ultimately, it moves us on to ground on which race as an ingredient of the term 'New', the qualifier of 'World', is dissected and contested. If 'the future' has failed not only Brazil but those who placed their hope in it, we may have to choose. Do we follow Bolsonaro into his alternative future, in which multiraciality is no longer a strength but a weakness, a future which calls for racial hierarchy and dominance? Or should we instead reassert the value of history by practicing history, moving back in time, uncovering a layer at a time? An alternative to a politics of inevitability or eternity is one that happens in time, in the present and the past: not merely in the future.

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When did the future begin? Our search should begin, at the latest, with Stefan Zweig. After the success of director Wes Anderson's brilliant *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, inspired by Anderson's reading of Zweig, this 'futurist' is perhaps better known than he has been for quite some time. An Austrian-born Jewish writer, he had been cast afloat in the early twentieth-century world and landed in Brazil during the Second World War. As George Prochnik has demonstrated in a compelling biography, Zweig 'never really felt at home anywhere'.<sup>4</sup> In 1936, as part of a PEN Tour, Zweig had first emerged as a Brazilianist, especially with his *Kleine Reise nach Brasilien* about his 'Small trip to Brazil'. In 1941, Zweig's final word on the country, *Brasilien: Ein Land der Zukunft*, saw the light. By 1942, Zweig and his second wife, Lotte, committed suicide in Petrópolis, the city famed as the imperial summer residence. Zweig, who had despaired for the future of Europe and civilisation, chose as the venue for his final protest a location dedicated to upholding Brazil's slavocratic *ancien régime* through most of the nineteenth century—a point that should not have been lost on a son of Vienna.

In German literature, there had and has been a longstanding question regarding Brazil and its future including, at least, the publication of Heinrich Schüller's *Brasilien, Ein Land der Zukunft* (1912) and Heinzbernd Krauskopf's *Brasilien, Zukunft für Alle?* (1980). In the English,



Brazil is either just plainly 'Land of the Future' or directly from the German 'A Land of the Future'. In the Portuguese it first became *Um país do futuro*—but soon in more general circulation it seems to have evolved to *O País do Futuro*, or *the country of the future*. Alternatively, Brazil is 'the land of the future', and it will always remain as such.<sup>5</sup> Zweig is the godfather of this old Brazilian chestnut, although he would have disproved of the sardonic addendum. For this 'Tocqueville of Brazil', his subject was almost the Lincolnian 'the last best hope of earth'.<sup>6</sup>

Brazil should have been the way out of the dead end in which Zweig found himself. The country had 'a special intellectual and moral position among all the nations of the earth'.<sup>7</sup> Zweig's generation, just like all that preceded it, would have to settle for itself how humans can coexist peacefully despite 'all the disparate races, classes, colors, religions, and convictions'. For Zweig this was the most pressing question, one that concerned all countries and states. Brazil in all its diversity would have been expected to be challenged like no one else, yet it alone had tackled the challenge 'in a more felicitous and exemplary manner' than anyone else—with Zweig writing an entire book to drive home this truth. In Zweig's estimation Brazil deserves not only our attention but 'also the admiration of the world'.

Brazil had solved the problems of the twentieth century; yet, Zweig was also writing a political apology for the Vargas dictatorship, which had hosted and celebrated him. To make matters worse, Zweig emerges from his text as an apologist not only for Vargas but also for the regime that upheld the institution of slavery: the Brazilian empire (1822–1889). In a truly astonishing passage Zweig argues that white is black and black is white, while saluting Brazilian civilisation:

It is no accident that what was for decades the only monarchy among all the American countries had as its emperor the most democratic, the most liberal of all crowned regents, and that today, when it is regarded as a dictatorship, it knows more individual freedom and contentment than most of our European countries. For that reason, one of our best hopes for a future civilizing and pacification of a world that has been desolated by hate and madness is based upon the existence of Brazil, whose will is directed solely toward peaceful construction. But where moral forces are at work, it is our task to strengthen that will.<sup>8</sup>

Zweig raises himself to the role of Brazilian propagandist 'in our distressed times' with the main aim of providing 'hope for a new future in new areas of the world'.<sup>9</sup> His duty and the objective of his book is to highlight such possibilities, including how impressed he was with the country's geography that would serve to attract people from 'overpopulated

areas'. Brazil remained within early days of its development—to an extent that made it difficult to fully imagine the role it would play in the future, for the coming generation.

As much as Zweig said he would look into the future, even he saw the codependence between the present and the past. Or in his words: 'Anyone who describes Brazil's present unconsciously already describes its past. Only he who looks at its past sees its true meaning'.<sup>10</sup> Too bad that the meaning Zweig discovered was both escapist and apologist. In a remarkable turn of events, the last country to have ended slavery in the Western hemisphere had become the country that had solved racial and other societal problems. For Zweig, ever yearning for the 'World of Yesterday' and the kings and queens of Europe, Brazil's nineteenth-century history under two emperors was a welcome one. Zweig definitely stood in a long line of European travellers, artists and philosophers who saw in 'new worlds' the possibility of exit from the dreadful politics of older worlds. Perhaps not entirely coincidentally many of Zweig's contemporaries were aghast at his refusal to involve himself in politics. For him, progress lay not in abstract ideas or even practical politics, but in cultural and moral transformation. Here Brazil was the model, one that underlined rather than contradicted his escapist tendencies. How would Zweig's observations translate into practical politics? He died before anyone had a chance to learn.

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Zweig did make a rather profound point about viewing his present from a Brazilian perspective. In Brazil, and its neighbourhood, the Second World War did not divide the long middle of the twentieth century, leaving behind an unbridgeable chasm. Sure, some Brazilians had served alongside other Allies in Europe, but time had not stopped and restarted as a result of that conflict. There was no specific trauma to process, no American world order to construct. To put it almost flippantly, the 1930s became the 1960s just like that. Therefore, the ideological development of Brazil was also not singularly defined by that conflict; instead one particular idea carried weight in that era. It was the notion that there was something special about the Portuguese empire and the world it still ruled or had left behind. The special sauce meant that the kind of strong racism that had conquered the Congo or the South (that is, of the United States) could not and did not exist in the Portuguese territories. Instead, miscegenation had built these societies and therefore they not only looked but also were substantively different.

This thought had a father: Gilberto Freyre, the abovementioned Pernambuco polymath who was the master of that most Brazilian literary form, the long-form essay. He wrote thousands upon thousands of

pages of lyrical copy, becoming in the process the greatest defender of the Brazilian way of life (and also an apologist for late European empire). In the process, the position of Brazil was elevated. For example, it was not only the United States that provided a mirror for Brazil, which it still often does in Brazilian discourse, but also Brazil for the United States. Brazil was held up, however problematically, as the solution to racial oppression and concomitant strife. In this mid-twentieth-century moment, English-reading and other foreign audiences were consumed by Brazil, and some examples of other authors included Vianna Moog and Frank Tannenbaum. Moog explained the differences between criminal-leaning, slave-raiding bandeirantes and the more wholesome and industrious pioneers. Based on this divergence in early exploration, the two countries also turned out differently. In the United States many detected meaningful parallels between their polity and that other federal republic of continental dimensions that was also forged from transatlantic slavery. Tannenbaum and his *Slave and Citizen* are one obvious example of this tendency.<sup>11</sup>

Freyre propagated that Brazil would settle the question of race relations on a planetary scale because of its peculiar historical formation, an argument on which Zweig agreed. Freyre had several avenues for sharing these ideas and even putting them into practice.<sup>12</sup> The first was the UN, which he addressed with title of Ambassador in 1949. Freyre's promotion of Brazilian race relations resulted in a UNESCO commission on the question, and the famed anthropologist Florestan Fernandes led a group of researchers at the University of São Paulo. Later, Freyre had a second avenue for pursuing these interests. Although the Portuguese dictator Salazar had earlier in life—in the 1930s—detested the racial-mixing implications of Freyre's thesis, emphasised as it did the African origins of not just Brazilians but also the Portuguese, by the 1950s he invited the Freyre to tour the contemporary colonies of Portugal.<sup>13</sup> This was a sign that Portugal—feeling anticolonial pressure from other corners of Europe and especially the United States—had to distinguish its own practices from those of colonialists who were not as enlightened on race. In the event, Freyre found Lusotropical race relations not only in Brazil but also in Portuguese Africa and elsewhere in the empire. As too often with those who wanted to essentialise a Portuguese model of race relations, Freyre ended up an apologist for power, buttressing the very last European colonial empire. Ultimately, this and his support for the Brazilian military dictatorship, starting in the 1960s, had him fall out of favour in many circles. It turned out that Freyre's in its own way extreme racial theory, like its European counterparts, could serve specious ends. Both Zweig's 'future' and the benign description of race relations that underpinned it were inflections of reactionary poetics.

Freyre's interventions did, however, highlight the connection between the politics of Portugal and Brazil. In meaningful ways, they have been tighter than those of any European metropole and New World colony. Originally, this was because Portugal resented giving Brazilian colonists any independence, including printing presses or universities. Later on, due to Napoleon's onslaught that swept across Europe a little over two centuries ago, the king of Portugal would rule his empire from Brazil. Lisbon is dead; long live Rio de Janeiro. Later, in the post-dictatorship era, both countries showed an aversion towards naming parties with anything but left-wing labels. Social democrats were the centre-right option, while socialist or Worker's Party was reserved for the centre-left option. It is in this context that we should understand the seemingly ludicrous name of Jaír Bolsonaro's Partido Social Liberal; it is anything but socially liberal, especially these days. Yet Bolsonaro brings us to a clear divergence between the two countries. Portugal has not had a right-wing emergence or emergency; Brazil has suffered the most powerful or pressing one on its continent since, at least, the days of Augusto Pinochet.

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As important as that mid-twentieth-century moment was for Brazil, the beginning of future talk did not entail the beginning of history—at most it was the beginning of the end of history. Both discourses concerning the future and discussions of race had long and sometimes even (in their own context) venerable histories. One such discourse was Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*, a work known to all Brazilian school children. This turn-of-century work documents the Canudos Rebellion (1895–1898) from the early days of the republic and frames it as a battle between modernity and backwardness—a topic and theme that Mario Vargas Llosa resuscitated in his 1981 *La Guerra del Fin de Mundo*. These are what Rolena Adorno has called 'polemics of possession' in the long line of Latin American disputation over the long shadow of the Conquest.<sup>14</sup> In this particular case, Millenarian 'Backlanders' rise up only to be crushed by an overwhelmingly powerful army marching in the name of progress. The politics of inevitability beat those of eternity, because the former had mightier arms.

*Os Sertões*, or *Backlands: The Canudos Campaign*, is a lengthy and variegated document to which we cannot do justice here. For our discussion, it is intriguing how the battle between two kinds of future talk is intermingled with hard racial theory. In this 1902 work, Euclides da Cunha does give the Backlander his due for hardness—he is 'above all a strong person'<sup>15</sup>—, but only amidst denunciations of racial mixing. The whole description of Canudos is almost as much

about the people who descend into the conflict than strictly about the conflict itself.

Miscegenation taken to the extreme signifies regression. The Indo-European, the Negro, the Brazilian-Guarani, and the Tapuia are racial groups in different stages of evolution that have come into contact with one another. Inter-marriage not only erases the better qualities of the superior race but also is the catalyst to the re-appearance of the primitive characteristics of the inferior one.<sup>16</sup>

If anyone was left unsure regarding the identity of the foe, the enemy of progress, da Cunha underlines how 'interspersed with these mad teachings [of rebellion leader Antônio Conselheiro] were the messianic ravings urging racial rebellion against the republican government'.<sup>17</sup> There we have it; Brazil's greatest civil war was framed as a struggle in terms of the hermeneutics of sacred time and race versus secular progress and deep hierarchies that carried over from the empire to the republic.

Without providing anything than the most cursory of final comments, it remains to be said that Brazilian millenarianism had strong colonial roots and such roots were necessarily intertwined with race. Its strongest proponent was none other than Antônio Vieira (1608–1697), a Portuguese of partially African heritage and also the seventeenth-century architect of a millenarian Fifth Empire on Luso-Brazilian foundations. Vieira, the orator, missionary, and adviser to kings and queens, brought together what he had learned about both political and missionary work in his 'History of the Future'. As a missionary along the Amazonian frontier Vieira became convinced that the Portuguese could look forward to an even greater age than the one of the Discoveries. It is for this very reason that unlike others before him Vieira considered himself a historian of the future and not of the past. History, as promised in biblical prophecies, was unfolding in the New World and Vieira, the missionary, was an agent of this process. The missionary work brought together the meeting and mixing of races and the progress of the Militant Church.

In this view, Brazil was the land of prophecy, where the history of the future would be written. Broader millenarian thinking did not originate in Vieira's seventeenth century or even with the Portuguese. Already in the sixteenth century, the indigenous belief in the 'Land without Evil' (*Terra sem mal*) served as a form of ritualistic rebellion against the Portuguese slaveholder, a rebellion which could be actualised by travelling into a more peaceful interior. This interior provided an escape from the conditions of oppression that had taken shape after the Portuguese had landed in Bahia in 1500 and especially after the colonial enterprise had begun to take fuller shape in the 1530s. Yet, the interior would close and, in the mid-twentieth century, the Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado

played with this indigenous-colonial concept in wonderfully dystopian fashion in his novel about warring land barons: *Terras sem fim*, or Lands without end.

Why did the Portuguese come to Brazil? In their own telling, the endless future tense of the papal bulls that gave the Portuguese dominion over their discoveries guided them there and in the most zealous accounts even compelled them forward. The bulls themselves came from Rome, both once home to the ideal *imperium*, a source of emulation, and also the keeper of the missionary call, which sought to bridge the chasm between the City of God and the City of Man—yet never succeeding in doing so. Whether Rome, or European monarchs who gave it pride of place, held one, two or more swords was ultimately of limited consequence. Rome was the fourth of five great monarchies or empires, as developed in the Book of Daniel, itself a derivative, a prophecy within sacred time. That is, perhaps, also the meaning of all the future talk embedded in (multi)racial theory: the immanent within the ugliness of modernity, the lipstick on the pig of supremacy.

Vieira and his many intellectual successors have sought to imagine and build a fifth monarchy or empire in Brazil. Perhaps it is time for something different: History as one sheet delayed after another. The 'land of the future' has a long, escapist past, but it not need have such a future. A longstanding millenarianism helps explain the seemingly eternal future orientation of Brazilian cultural, intellectual and political thought, rhetoric and praxis. Future as salvation can be violent; future made today, in the present, day by day, need not be and it can serve as the foundation of democracy. The country of the future is a country, like all other countries, in need of history.

## Notes

- 1 See: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPj4KyLw8Wc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPj4KyLw8Wc).
- 2 Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018), 8.
- 3 Gilberto Freyre, *Brazil – An Interpretation* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1945), 89.
- 4 George Prochnik, *The Impossible Exile: Stefan Zweig at the End of the World* (New York: Other Press, 2014), 354.
- 5 The term itself seems to have been the invention of Stefan Zweig's English translator's rather than his own. In Brazil, the phrase used—both in the translation of Zweig's work and more broadly—'country of the future'.
- 6 Abraham Lincoln, State of the Union address, 1862.
- 7 Stefan Zweig, *Brazil: A Land of the Future*, translated by Lowell A. Bangerter (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 2000), 9.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 11 Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1946).

- 12 For a fuller account of Freyre, see Peter Burke and Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, *Gilberto Freyre: Social Theory in the Tropics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008).
- 13 Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes, *Salazar: A Political Biography* (Enigma Books: New York, 2009), 356–7.
- 14 Rolena Adorno, *Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).
- 15 Euclides da Cunha, *Backlands: The Canudos Campaign* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 96.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 142.

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